PRICE TWO SHILLINGS

Court Royal

By the Author of "Mehalah"

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COURT ROYAL

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A STORY OF CROSS CURRENTS

BY THE

AUTHOR OF 'MEHALAH' 'JOHN HERRING' &c.

A NEW EDITION

LONDON
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PREFACE.

WHEN in 1880 the author published 'Mehalah,' his critics, public and private, attacked him or remonstrated with him because there was no moral to the story—because 'Mehalah' was not, as the Germans would say, a *Tendenzroman*. No doubt that life is but an acted Æsop's Fables, in which the actors are human, but it is surely allowable in an author to take wings occasionally, and fly away from the stings and goads of moral applications which prog one in everyday life, into the region of unmoralising fancy. However, in his second attempt, 'John Herring,' he did have a moral purpose throughout his story, and his critics, public and private, with one accord—only excepting a couple of Scottish reviewers—failed to see it. He complained of this one day to one of his critics, who replied, 'We have no time to dive for purposes, we skim for story.' That is true generally of the English reader, specially of the novel reader, who dips but does not plunge. Therefore the author acknowledges that he made a mistake. A purpose, a moral, must not be sunk in the depths like a pearl, but tossed up on the margin as the amber, conspicuous to the first passer-by.

His object in 'John Herring' was to show that man's character is only moulded by mistakes. His reviewers objected that his hero was characterless: that was his purpose—to show an amiable, well-intentioned man, shaped by his misfortunes. There was another, and deeper, purpose in the story, which was to show how a noble character can only be formed which has before it an ideal, and that the ideal which elevates character is ever, and ever must be, unattainable. The man without an ideal sinks; the man with one rises; but in so rising passes through agonies. *This* life is his purgatory. Only the man without an ideal is happy—brutally happy.

And now the author will correct his previous error, and expose the purpose of this new story at the outset. To do this, he will tell the story of its inception.

In the summer of 1883, as he was returning from his holiday in Tyrol, he came across an account of a Croatian mother who, in a state of absolute destitution, pawned her child to save its life and pro-

long her own. He occupied and amused himself, during his railway journey home, in trying to work out what would be the moral and mental result in such an instance, supposing the child to be a girl endowed by nature with generous emotions and considerable shrewdness. It struck him that such a character, so developed, would be typical of the individualism and impatience of restraint, social, moral, and religious, combined with impulsive generosity, which is the feature of the new civilisation, about also to be the motive force of the future, that is coming everywhere to the front.

He had read recently a Polish story, entitled 'Morituri,' which depicted the decay of a Polish princely race, and it occurred to the author to take such a family, steeped in traditional culture, infused with feudal-Christian morality, as the representative of the old civilisation which is melting and disappearing everywhere, as the other becomes concrete and asserts itself.

Again, the author asked himself, What would be the result, what the mutual action and reaction, if such a line of life as that which he had ideally traced in one of his heroines—the representative of the Coming Age—were run athwart the threads of old culture and ethics? Would each act on the other at all, to modify its peculiarities and broaden its view of life? To take another simile, would such a vein of molten, fiery, nineteenth century individuality, operating vertically, do other than shatter the superincumbent, horizontal social beds? Would it be itself at all metamorphosed in the process?

The author was teased by the problem that rose continually in his brain. He felt that he could only work it out by calling his representative characters out of the vasty deep of conjecture, and setting them on the table giving them souls and letting them move and act towards each other automatically, and work out the problem for themselves. Such, then, is the history of the genesis of this story, and the reader is requested to bear its purpose in mind as he skims it. Two types in two groups are opposed to each other; each group represents a set of ideas, social and moral, the one coming on, conquering, overwhelming, the other disappearing and likely soon to be looked back upon as having become extinct in the moral world like asceticism and mysticism. There are two heroines each the focusing of the good qualities of the two groups, and two heroes each the concentration of the infirmities of the same.

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CHAPTER I.

A LITTLE DEVIL.

At the top or at the bottom? At which shall we begin? Sediment to-day is scum to-morrow. That which is on the surface sinks. Therefore, does it matter? The universe is in revolution, so is the social order. We will begin at the bottom, as most philosophical. Only the builders of Lagado began their edifices at the apex. The Barbican is the oldest portion of ancient Plymouth. It consists of a collection of crazy houses built along the quay of Sutton Pool, which was the ancient port of Plymouth. The houses are tall, with slated fronts and bow windows, much out of the perpendicular, of various dates. In these houses dwelt the old merchants of Plymouth, who equipped vessels against the Spaniards and carried Tavistock friezes to all the ports of Europe. From Sutton Pool Drake sailed against the Armada. The grand merchant-houses have become the habitations of dealers in marine stores, drinking-shops, and eating-houses.

Sic transit gloria mundi.

The houses on the Barbican are so crowded that they are devoid of back yards, and when the inhabitants have a washing they thrust their garments from their windows on poles to dry in the sea-breeze and the sun. Some ingenious dwellers in these old houses contrive a system of rigging between their poles whereby a much larger wash can be exposed. On every day that lends itself to drying, the Barbican flutters its flags

and streamers. The flags vary in shape, more than in colour, and most of all in their heraldic achievements. Some are 'enhanced' with flaunches, others with bendlets, frets, bordures, even with bars sinister. Certain bifurcated pennons show a leaning towards 'escutcheoning.' The banners are for the most part white, tawny as old Tiber, or Isabelle. Some few are azure of a deep and dingy blue. From one window a circular mass of drapery, gules, bulges in the wind. It is the petticoat of the lady of the ham and sausage shop.

One corner house, standing between two thoroughfares, never displayed its bunting. Apparently, no washing was ever done in it. Over the door of this house hung three golden balls, and in scaling paint over the window was inscribed the name—'LAZARUS.'

The Barbican is not a savoury place. Here the fish are unladen and sold, and here the little fish that fall out of the baskets get trampled out of shape, and rot in the mire.

When the tide is out, the ooze in Sutton Pool sends up its complement of effluvium. Providentially, the sea-tangles, hanging from the wharf in fringes of dull green, exhale chlorine, and the sea-breeze brings in ozone, to disinfect and disperse the pestilential odours.

The Barbican is a busy place all day, and late into the night; but at noon, for an hour, it drops into quiet. Then all the sound that habitually pervades it is sucked in at the doors of the taverns and eating-houses, and fills them to repletion.

It was precisely at this hour, one hot day in early June, that the stillness of the Barbican quay was broken by piercing and protracted shrieks.

Two persons and a cat alone occupied the wharf at that time: the one was the pier-guard, who was then lounging on the wall looking seaward; the other was an old woman sitting under a large umbrella with her back to sun and sea, fast asleep before the table of gingerbeer-bottles of which she disposed. The cat took no notice of the screams, nor did the old woman, who only woke when the quay became repeopled and business looked alive. The guard turned leisurely round, drew his hands out of his pockets, walked to the steps by which passengers disembarked from the Oreston steamer, descended them, cast off a boat, and, stepping in, shouted, 'Hold hard, you little devil!'

Some faces, attracted by the cries, appeared at the windows, but the view was obscured by fluttering drapery. The lady

over the ham and sausage shop, Thresher by name, saw what was the matter ; her visual ray was not cut off by the washing. She shouted some practical advice, then turned and scolded her husband, who lay on the bed with his boots upon the pillow, reading a Radical paper. After that she drew on a jacket and descended to the quay.

Some men, moreover, who had finished their dinner, issued from the eating-houses to ascertain what was the matter, and those who had not done bolted the rest of their food, fearful of being too late for an accident, yet unwilling to leave unconsumed good victuals for which they had paid.

The screams became louder, shriller. Then they were interrupted for a minute, again to ring forth as loudly as before.

The cries issued from the lungs of a child—a girl—of twelve, who was in the arms of a wretched-looking woman. They were near the edge of the quay when the screams began. The woman was attempting to fling herself and the child into the water. The girl had her arms about an old cannon, planted in the granite coping as a hold for hawsers, and clung to it desperately. Finally, the superior strength of the woman prevailed, and she precipitated herself and the child over the edge into the Pool. Then, for a moment, the cries were silenced, for a moment only, while the child was under water. Both rose to the surface, covered with mud, near a chain. In a moment, the child saw her opportunity, grasped the chain, and crawled up it, with the water streaming from her, looking like a drowning rat, and again she shrieked as loud as her lungs would allow.

In a moment, also, the pierkeeper was at hand in the boat. He lifted the woman out of the water, and then laid hold of the child. The latter, unable at first to distinguish that the hands grasping her were not those of her mother, and that the object for which she was grasped was not to drown her, clung frantically to the chain, and yelled with such force and penetration in the tones, that the guard lost patience, and said angrily, 'Let go, you squalling cat, will you?'

Instantly the child relaxed her hold, and allowed herself to be lifted into the boat. She knew, by the voice, that she was in the hands of a man, come to save her. When she was in the boat, she dipped her palms in the water, and washed the mud from her eyes and mouth and nose. After that she set

herself to clean the face of her mother with the skirt of her frock.

'What is the meaning of this?' said the man.

'I wouldn't be drownded,' answered the child. 'I told mother as much, but her paid no heed to what I said.'

'Now then, missus,' said he, addressing the woman with rough kindness, 'what did you do it for?'

The poor creature made no reply. She sat, cuddled into a heap in the bottom, hugging her knees, with the water pouring off her. Her head was bowed on her bosom.

'Did y' hear, now?' shouted the child, raising the sodden hair off the mother's ear. 'The gemman asked you a civil question, and you must answer him civil too. He asked you what made you do it.'

'I am wretched,' she replied in a faint voice; 'my husband is dead. We have been starving. I can find no situation because of Joanna, and get no work. I did not know what to do with myself and her, and as us couldn't find a situation on earth, I thought we'd go and get one in heaven.'

'But I wouldn't,' put in the girl, emphatically, looking the boatman level in the eyes. 'I told mother plain I was not agreeable. I don't want to go to heaven—and,' with a stamp on the bottom of the boat, 'I won't go.'

'You've a will of your own, apparently,' said the man, smiling.

'I don't choose to be drownded,' answered the girl. Then she thrust her wet and dirty hair out of her face, and tried to knot it behind her head, 'and I don't choose as mother shall be, neither.'

'I'll tell you what, ma'am,' said the pierkeeper; 'two good things have combined for the saving of you to-day. First comes I. I was on the spot handy. Secondly, the tide was running out and leaving the Pool dry; so there was no depth available for drowning purposes.' The boat touched the steps. 'Up with you, both,' he said, 'and mind, no more of these games.'

The wretched woman obeyed meekly. The child strode up the stone stairs full of confidence, saying, but hardly in a tone of apology, 'You know, mother, I was not agreeable.'

The woman staggered after her daughter to the pier, and then stood there helpless, dazed, looking about her without light in her eyes.

The water ran off her and formed a pond at her feet; the

slime was smeared over her hair and face and hands. Her soaked garments clung to her, revealing at once how few and thin they were.

By this time several persons had assembled. They surrounded the little group and eyed them curiously. These were mostly men, still chewing the remains of their dinner or picking their teeth. Mrs. Thresher, from the ham-shop, was there in a black body over a red petticoat, very short, exposing dirty stockings and slippers down at heel.

Questions showered on the poor creature, which she did not answer, perhaps did not catch. She clutched her child's hand convulsively, and with disengaged hand wiped the water from her eyes.

'Now look you here,' said the pier-guard, 'you oughtn't to have done it, or if you did ought to do it, you ought to have done it in a less dirty place. Sutton Pool is not a palatable place in which to end existence. Wait till the tide is out, and have a look for yourself. I reckon further acquaintance won't make you more friendly. It will rinse all taste of *felo-de-se* out of your mouth. Dead cats, rotten cabbage, decayed potatoes, cracked cloam (crockery), old tobacco-pipes, kettles and pans full of holes, boots bursted, and soleless shoes, scatted (broken) bottles, anything, everything that goes to make filth is chucked in there, and rots away into black paste which is proper consolidated smeech (smell). I reckon that Sutton Pool bottom is made of the dirtiest dregs of civilisation. That is what we've hauled you and your brat out of. If you've any sense of decency in you, keep out of Sutton Pool. The blue sea is a different crib altogether.'

'I won't be drownded neither in the blue sea, nor in Sutton Pool, nor in a pickling-tub,' said the child resolutely; 'I'm damned if I be.'

The circle of lookers-on burst out laughing.

'Oh, you wicked child!' exclaimed Mrs. Thresher, of the ham-shop. 'Where do you expect to go, using them swearing words?'

'Father said it when he meant a thing—much,' answered the child.

'Your father smoked, I reckon.'

'Yes, he did.'

'But you don't see ladies smoke.'

'No.'

'Well,' said Mrs. Thresher, 'pipes and cusses are nat'ral in

a man's mouth, but natur' herself protests when you see either in the mouth of a woman.'

'Did you hear how the little creature squealed?' asked the pierkeeper.

'Her cries drew me from my dinner, and lost me the picking of my rabbit-bones,' said one of the men.

'I'd have had another glass of ale,' said a second,' 'but I thought two foreigners was fighting and sticking knives into each other. I wouldn't ha' missed *that*. I was always a bit of a sportsman since I was a boy.'

'I cried,' said the girl, 'because I would not let mother drown me.'

'And cry tha' did, by jiggers!' exclaimed a skipper, a large man from Yorkshire. 'I was down in my cabin when tha' piped.'

'Look here,' said the pier-guard; 'if us stand here in a knot, the police will be suspecting something and turn their beaks this way. Then they'll have this unfortunate female up before the magistrates on the double charge of felo-de-se and felo-de-child, and transport her for it to Dartmoor. So let us be moving. Now then, ma'am!'—he spoke to the woman, planting himself before her, legs apart, and his hands on his hips—'if you will pass your word that you won't play no more of these pranks, I'll let you go; if not, I'll tow you into custody myself.'

'No, sir, I won't do it no more,' said the miserable creature.

'Her sha'n't!' protested the child.

'What is to be done with them?' asked the pierman. 'They are both wet to the marrow of their bones.'

No one was prepared with an answer. One man, suspecting a subscription, tailed away.

'You must go home and have a change,' said the pierman kindly. 'And let me counsel a drop of hot grog. It will drive the chill out of you and the squealer.'

'I have no home—I have no change! I have nowhere and nothing,' answered the woman mournfully.

'There is that blessed institootion, the Work'us, always open,' said one man in a tone of sarcasm.

'I'd rather drown than go there,' answered she; 'there they'd take my Joanna from me.'

A grunt of assent.

'Her's got the proper principles of a Christian,' said the woman in the red petticoat. 'I'd go into Sutton Pool myself

rather than into the House. I reckon in the matter of dirt they're about equal, only in the House it's moral, and in the Pool its physical.'

'Sither, lass,' said the skipper, in strong Yorkshire accent, 'how didst 'a come here? Tell us all aboot it.'

'My husband died,' she answered timidly; 'I sold everything I had, bit by bit, till all was gone. I couldn't pay my rent, and I couldn't buy no food. I went from place to place after work, but I could get none. No one would give me a situation till I got rid of the child. All were in one song—"Send her to the Union." I couldn't do that; so I thought we'd both go to heaven together.'

'Have you no change of clothes anywhere?' asked Mrs. Thresher; 'because, if you have, you may change in my room, and I'll turn my old man out while you do it.'

'I've naught but what I stand up in,' said the poor creature, 'nor has Joanna, neither.'

'Now, then, my lads,' said the pierman, casting his eye round, 'I propose we raise a few shillings among us to rig out the pair afresh.'

'I reckon Mr. Lazarus can fit them out,' said one of the bystanders.

'O' course he can,' said the skipper; 'but he'll not do't wi'out brass. Here's half-a-crown to start wi'. Who'll give something upon that? Here's my cap as collecting-box.'

'It 'll come expensive,' remarked a bargeman in sepulchral tones; 'I know what the rig-out of my missus costs me.'

'A gown can be had secondhand for a trifle.'

'A gown ain't all,' said the bargeman mysteriously.

'What else, then?'

'What else? Why, there's stays,' growled the bargeman. 'Them figures—new—seven and eightpence three-farthings!'

'Then there's a petticoat,' suggested a pilot, timidly; 'if you doubt my word look around at all the fluttering bunting. Women must wear them things somehow, and they don't use 'em as caps.'

'*A* petticoat!' exclaimed the north-country skipper. 'Every respectable lass has two—one coloured, t'other white.'

'Must the little maid have stays, too?' asked the pier-keeper.

'All females has stays,' answered the bargeman. 'Girls has 'em without bones. The bones come later in life.'

'What more?' asked the skipper.

A dead silence. The men were thinking and looking inquiringly at the dripping woman, who was too bewildered to reply.

'Where is Mrs. Thresher? her can tell us,' said the pilot.

But Mrs. Thresher was gone to her room to turn her old man out of it and prepare for the contingency of receiving the poor woman into it.

Still silence. The men's brows were wrinkled with hard thought. It was broken by the rumbling bass of the bargeman. 'Dress-improver!'

'Must the little maid have one?'

'Of course. All females have dress-improvers,' said the bargeman, puffing and swelling with consciousness of superior knowledge. 'Four-and-ten is about the figure.'

'That makes five articles apiece, mates,' said the pierkeeper, checking them off on his fingers: 'thumb for gown, fore and middle fingers stand for petticoats, the last but one for stays, and the little chap is dress-improver. Now, then, mates, see what we can raise among us for the poor creatures.'

The party moved along the quay towards the pawnshop, the Yorkshire skipper revolving, cap in hand, among the members.

'I've been considering,' said he, after a while, 'as how I might find the lass a berth aboard my vessel if she could get shut (rid) of the bairn. We could do wi' a woman to cook and wash for us; and shoo might addle (earn) a few shillings that road. What do you think o' that, mates? And what dost' a say to it thysel', lass?'

The dazed woman looked at the Yorkshireman without understanding his proposal. He repeated it in more intelligible form; then she comprehended it, and her wan face lighted up, only to dull again.

'May I take my Joanna?'

'That's the scratch,' said the skipper. 'Shoo's wick as a scoprill (lively as a teetotum), and I'd be glad if I could; but we can't find room for little bairns.'

The pilot explained: 'Can't find room on board for little maidens.'

'What is to become of my Joanna?' asked the bewildered woman, looking with blank eyes about her.

The man with a vein of sarcasm in him, who had before suggested the Union, threw out another suggestion, likewise ironical. 'As you're about to get clothes of Mr. Lazarus,

perhaps you can pawn the child to him, and raise a few shillings on her!'

The suggestion elicited a general laugh. The woman, however, took it seriously, and walked towards the pawnbroker's shop, drawing the child along with her.

'Here is t'brass a've gotten together for thee,' said the skipper, pouring the coin from his cap into her hand. 'Take it, and get the ten articles thyself.'

Then he signed to the others to withdraw, and they, with great delicacy, did so, whilst the woman entered the pawnbroker's shop.

'Mates,' said the skipper, 'leave the lass to do the shopping alone. It's more decent. She'll get the ten articles. Trust a woman to bargain. And whilst shoo's aboot it we'll put heads together and consider what is to be done wi' the little bairn.'

'Did you hear her scream?' asked the pilot.

'Her 'd do as a syren (steam whistle) to an ironclad, and rouse the Three Towns (Plymouth, Stonehouse, and Devonport) when coming into harbour.'

'Scream!' exclaimed another man, 'I should like to know what man or woman but the old lady under the umbrella by the ginger-beer could fail to hear her. Mark my words! That little maid ain't born to be drowned. How her worked her way up the chain out o' the slime! Well,' sententiously, 'there be other chains than that in this world; and may she work herself up the next she catches as well as she went up that!'

CHAPTER II.

PAWNED.

THE woman entered the shop of Mr. Lazarus. When there she stood trembling and looking down, confused or frightened, whilst the child at her side peered about with eager eyes at the articles with which the shop was crowded.

Mr. Lazarus was a dark man, of distinct Israelitish type, his hair cut short, like moleskin, but his jaws and chin covered with a bristly scrub. He was wont to shave once a week, and went bristly and black between times. His eye ran over the

customer, and took stock of what she wore. He soon satisfied himself that she had nothing about her in his way, except a gold wedding-ring.

Mr. Lazarus looked suspiciously and threateningly at the child. He detested children. They played marbles, ball, tip-cat on the pavement, and broke his windows. They shouted after him, 'Rags and bones!' or 'Old clo'!' through their noses, or put their heads into his shop, and asked how he was off for soap, or 'Any black puddings or bacon rashers to-day.'

The pawnbroker was frequently engaged, behind his counter, whittling at a stick, lying in wait to rush forth with it upon the urchins who offended him. It was rarely, however, that he caught the delinquents. He more often fell upon, or fell over, an inoffensive and unoffending child, and rattled his stick about its sides. Then the parents—the mother certainly—would appear on the scene and join in the noise, belabouring Mr. Lazarus with her tongue. When matters reached this point, Mr. Lazarus would return to his shop, with the stick tucked under his arm, growling Levitical imprecations.

'What do you want?' asked Mr. Lazarus, looking up from an account-book, and laying the stick on the table.

'Please, sir,' answered the woman in a faint, frightened voice, 'I want a set of dry clothes for myself and Joanna.'

'Certainly,' answered the Jew with alacrity. 'Tumbled into the Pool, eh? About what figure, pray?'

'This is all I have,' answered she, extending her hand and opening it.

'One half-crown, two shillings, one'—he rang it—'bad, two sixpences, and eight threepenny bits, also one French ha'penny, which don't pass current. I return you the shilling. You may be able to get others to take it, less wideawake. That makes six-and-six. Can't do much for you at that price.'

Then the poor creature said, 'Please, sir, you'll be liberal, I hope. I've nothing else, and am wet to the marrow. I have brought the child. I thought to raise a few shillings on her.'

'The child! What do you mean?'

'My darling, my Joanna.'

Mr. Lazarus turned a green hue.

'You're trying to make sport of me!' he exclaimed, clutching at his stick. 'You've been put up to it. I won't stand this sort of game. Get out at once.'

'Please, sir,' said the woman, trembling with cold and

alarm, 'the gentleman outside as fished me from the Pool got up a subscription for me, that I might have dry clothes. I've no more, but if you'd consent to take the child——'

'I take the child—I—I!' screamed Mr. Lazarus. 'Children are the plague of my life. I wouldn't have one if offered for nothing.'

'Then, sir, I must take the money elsewhere.'

'Oh!' said the pawnbroker, 'six-and-six is it? Pity it should be lost. Do you think the gentlemen would subscribe a little more? The charitable feelings, when well worked, are very yielding. If you'd make believe to be desperate, and about to fall or throw yourself in again, maybe the collecting cap would go round again, and the sum disposable mount to eleven-and-six. At eleven-and-six I might consider you. I can't so much as look at you for six-and-six. Just cast your eyes over this myrtle-green trimmed with cream lace! Don't it make your mouth water?'

'I'm watering all over,' sighed the woman. 'I only want ordinary dry clothes.'

'Or this Dolly Varden with panniers, a little passed in style, and a kiss-me-quick bonnet. Make you quite irresistible, miss—beg pardon—ma'am, I mean.'

'I have no more. I can get no more. I need only a cotton dress and underclothing.'

'Lor' bless you!' exclaimed the Jew, 'what does that latter signify so long as the gown is gorgeous? Try to screw some more from the gents outside. If you cried, now, in a proper heart-rending way?'

The woman shook her head despairingly. 'I did not ask for this. I want only necessaries. Why did they not let me drown, and be at rest?'

'What, ma'am?' said the Jew. 'Drown with an available six-and-six on the quay awaiting you! The thing is ridiculous!'

'Please, sir, will you take the child?'

'What do you mean?' asked Lazarus testily, turning green again.

'I mean my Joanna,' answered the woman, pointing to the little girl at her side.

Mr. Lazarus waxed wroth. 'Do I take little girls? Eh! look round and see what are the articles in my shop. Dolls; yes, they don't eat. China figures; yes, they don't wear out clothes. I'm not a cannibal. Can't make butcher's meat out

of children. I wish I might. I'd set up shambles and reduce their numbers.'

'I don't want to sell Joanna,' said the woman in a dull, distressed voice, 'I wouldn't sell her for a thousand guineas. But I thought, no offence, I might pawn her for a time, so as to make up the difference, and get a fit out of dry clothes for both of us.'

'Be off with you! This is no foundling hospital where every troublesome child may be left. Get out of this, or I'll rattle my stick about the bones of the monkey.'

'I have nowhere to go to, sir. I have passed my word not to fling myself into the sea again. You shall have Joanna, sir, for half-a-sovereign.'

'Half-a-sovereign!' cried Mr. Lazarus, starting back. 'Have I human ears to hear such a proposition? Half-a-sovereign for a little maggot that'll eat her own weight of nourishing victuals every day! I won't have her at any price. Chuck her into Sutton Pool.'

'I won't be drownded,' said the child resolutely.

'I throwed her in once, and her crawled out like a spider running along its cobweb.'

'Do with her what you will. I'll have nothing to say to her,' cried the angry pawnbroker. Then working himself into fury, 'Will you be off? Look what a pond you two have made in my shop. The floor is swimming. A mop won't take it up in a week; and all the iron-ware, and the forks and knives, will be rusted, and the cloth and leather mildewed.'

'Well, sir,' sighed the woman, 'give me back the money, and I'll go.'

'Six-and-six!' said Mr. Lazarus in a softer tone, 'six-and-six *is* six-and-six. Can't we deal reasonably and quietly? What is the advantage of your working yourself up into fever and fury?'

'Please, sir,' said the woman with pertinacity, such as could hardly be looked for in one so timid and dazed, 'I can have a situation if I get rid of the child.'

'Well, what is that to me?'

'I won't sell her, sir! and I won't send her to the Union. If you'll be so kind as to take her, and lend me half-a-sovereign on her, I'll throw in my wedding-ring beside.'

'Let me look at it. I dare be sworn it is brass.'

'We were well off when us married, and could afford it,' explained the woman. Then, whilst the Jew was examining

the ring, and testing it with acid, she said, 'My Joanna is of pure gold. You'd better take her, sir. You'd never repent. I reckon she can do most things. Her can wash——'

'I have no washing done here,' said Lazarus, shortly. 'Never found the need. The Barbican is poisoned with the smell of yellow soap and the reek of drying linen.'

'Then, sir, her can cook you a rasher of bacon——'

'I never eat of the pig,' screamed Lazarus, and spat on the floor.

'Her can kindle a fire——'

'And waste tons of coal.'

'Her can nurse the babies——'

'I've no babies. I don't want 'em. I wouldn't have 'em.'

'Her can run messages like a greyhound, and mind the shop when you are out; and should burglars try to break in, her would scream, and scream, and scream.'

'Eh!' said Lazarus, looking up, interested. 'Was that she screaming half-an-hour ago?'

'It was. Her can scream when proper. Other times she's as still as a mouse.'

Mr. Lazarus considered for a few moments. He rubbed his bristly chin, blew his nose in a fashion almost lost in this age of refinement. Then he leaned both elbows on the counter and stared at the girl. Mr. Lazarus was nervous about burglars. Unwittingly the mother had touched a fibre in his soul that quivered. Report credited him with vast wealth, with money, plate, jewellery, stored in the crazy old house. More than once he had been alarmed by attempts to break in. He had an infirmity which he could not master. He slept so soundly that nothing woke him. The Barbican was a noisy place by night as well as by day. Tipsy sailors rambled about it, drunken women squabbled, foreign sailors fought on the quay. The ear in time became so accustomed to noises that they ceased to disturb. Lazarus had resolved to get a dog, but begrudged the food it would consume. Following this train of thought, he said to himself, 'Half-a-sov.! I could get a mongrel pup for less.'

'Sir,' argued the woman, 'with a pup you wouldn't get a gold wedding-ring.'

'That is true, but a dog eats bones, and girls eat meat.'

'Oh! my Joanna hasn't much of that. A crust of bread and some dripping—her never gets beyond that. Besides, you'd have to pay tax on a dog, not on a girl.'

'That also is true, but a dog grows his own coat, and a girl grows out of every suit you put her into.'

'The girl is a golden girl, gold through and through,' said the mother. 'She wakes early, and has her hand in work all day; is never idle, never plays, never neglects a duty; try her.'

Mr. Lazarus came from behind the counter, put his hand under Joanna's chin, and thrust the wet hair from her brow. He pursed up his lips, half closed his eyes, and studied her critically.

Then Joanna, surmising that Mr. Lazarus was about to relent, put forth her full powers of resistance. She clawed at his coat, which being rusty gave way; she bit at his hands, and made them bleed; she kicked his shins, and forced him to caper; and she yelled, as surely no mortal lungs had yelled before.

The men outside drew near the shop, flattened their noses against the window-panes and looked in, then grinned, rubbed their hands, laughed in each other's faces, and said: 'Her's born to make a noise in the world, no mistake—an irrepressible.' Then they backed. The screams pierced the drums of their ears like bradawls.

Joanna danced and tore, and shrieked and writhed. 'I am not good,' she cried; 'I am not golden. I am bad, and brazen. I'm a little devil. Don't buy me. I'm worth nothing at all. I scream all day. All night as well. No one can sleep in the house where I am. I never work. I scat (break) all the cloam (crockery). I smash the windows. I set a house on fire. I'm a devil; I'm a devil.'

In vain did the poor mother reason with, and try to pacify the child. The little creature was as one possessed. She shook herself in convulsions of rage, so that the water spirted off her, as from a poodle drying itself after a bath.

Mr. Lazarus was fain to put the counter between himself and the child. He was not angry; he looked on approvingly.

'With burglars,' said he, nodding to the mother, 'this would be first-rate.'

Then the girl tore round the shop, kicking the counter, and dashing against the goods piled in the corners.

'Look here!' said Mr. Lazarus. 'Do you see all these walking-sticks? Thorn and bamboo they are. I'll try their respective merits on your ribs, you wild cat, unless you desist.' Then to the mother, 'She will do. I take her. You shall have

the money. I must stop the noise first; there is no dealing because of it.'

Then, feebly assisted by the woman, the pawnbroker carried the child, kicking, tearing, howling, into the kitchen, to the coalhole, into which he thrust her. Then he tried to lock her in, but she dashed herself against the door, and beat the lock when he attempted to fasten it. After many efforts he succeeded in turning the key.

'There,' said he, 'squall yourself hoarse. Bang your hands and knees raw. No one will heed.'

He returned to the shop with the mother, who was trembling and crying.

He shut the kitchen door, and the shop door leading into the house likewise; nevertheless the cries and thumpings from the coalhole were still audible, though distant and muffled.

Mr. Lazarus wiped his brow. 'There is life in the child. There are will and pertinacity,' he said. 'She knows her own mind, which is more than do many. Here is the half-sovereign.'

'Thank you, sir. You understand, I don't sell her.'

'Of course not, of course not.'

'I only pawn her,' said the woman, timidly.

'To be sure, to be sure.'

'And, sir, I want my ticket.'

'What ticket?'

'The pawn-ticket, sir, so that when I bring the money I may have my child back out of pawn.'

'By all means,' said Mr. Lazarus. 'And when shall we say the time is up?'

'Well, sir, if I may make it seven years, I'll take it as a favour. Joanna is now twelve, and in seven she'll be nineteen. I may be able to redeem her in a few months, but I cannot tell. I'm going away in a ship, and I don't know where to. I should like a margin, so as to give me plenty of time to look about, and scrape.'

'Certainly,' said Mr. Lazarus. 'Seven years let it be. The interest will be ten per cent. A shilling a year. In seven years that will be seven shillings for interest. I'll write you out the ticket at once. Hand me over the wedding-ring again. You took it up just now. The half-sovereign and the six-and-six—less twopence for the ticket, that makes sixteen-and-four. This is what you want to lay out in dry clothes. We will see if we can suit you. The myrtle-green and cream lace won't do.

Style unbecoming. Something warm and useful. I understand. Here is the ticket. Number six hundred and seventeen your daughter is, ma'am. Six hundred and seventeen. Now your name, please?'

'Marianne Rosevere.'

'And my little maid is——'

'Six hundred and seventeen.'

CHAPTER III.

LAZARUS.

When the mother was gone, with dry and decent garments, and the drumming and roaring at the cellar door had ceased, Mr. Lazarus went to the coalhole and unlocked it.

Then Joanna walked forth. She had gone in wet; she emerged caked in coal-dust, black as a sweep. Clothing, hands, face, hair, were all black. Nothing was clean about her but the white of her eyes, her red lips and shining teeth.

Mr. Lazarus held the door and stood back. He expected her to fly forth, snapping and snarling like a spiteful dog. He feared for his shins, and therefore held a stick for protection. But Joanna came forth composedly, without a word.

'I must confess,' said the pawnbroker, reassured, 'you *do* look like a little devil. I don't think you could come it more natural, got up for the occasion with theatrical properties.'

'I am not a little devil,' said the girl, standing in the midst of the kitchen, and looking at Mr. Lazarus. 'I am a girl; I am not bad, I am good; I am gold, not brass; I am not idle, I work hard; I rise early; I break nothing; I knit; I sew; I cook; I scream. Where is my mother? Is she gone?'

'Gone, gone right away on end. She has pawned you to me for seven years; raised ten shillings on you—more than you are worth, if coined.'

'I am worth more than ten shillings; I am worth ten pounds.'

'You understand you can't go to mother; you are pawned. If your mother does not come back in seven years, then you fall to me altogether as my own. Do you understand?'

'Yes,' said the girl. 'Mother has pawned everything else she had down to me. Now is my turn. I will stay.'

'Your number is six hundred and seventeen. Look in my ledger ; there you are till cancelled. Why did you scream so horribly ?'

'Because I wanted to be with mother.'

'And now you are content to remain with me ?'

'I am pawned ; I can't help myself. Mother has raised the money on me. I must stay till she returns with the ticket and the half-sovereign.'

'And the interest—the interest at ten per cent.,' insisted Mr. Lazarus.

'I know nothing about that,' said the girl. 'I will stay till mother brings the money. I cannot help myself.'

'Come along, you squalling cockatoo,' said the pawnbroker ; 'I will show you over the place, and tell you what your work will be. This is the kitchen.'

'And that is your nose. I have eyes. You wouldn't make me believe this a parlour if you swore to it.'

'You are a queer imp.'

'I am good,' said the girl. 'I will cook the dinner, and then you will say the same.'

'No waste of coals here,' observed Lazarus gravely. 'To think of the profligate waste among the rich ! The tons of coal they burn ; nothing to show for it but smoke and ashes ! I never turned a penny by coals in all my life, never.'

'I have,' said Joanna.

'I shall be glad to hear how you managed that.'

'It was this way. We'd a little garden ran down to the water, where the coal-barges went by. I corked an empty soda-water bottle and hung it to the branch of an apple-tree. When the bargemen went by they couldn't hold off having a shy at the bottle, and they shied lumps of coal. I went out every day with a shovel. We kept the kitchen fire with that bottle, and the beauty was she never broke. Couldn't, you understand, because her swung when hit.'

Lazarus looked at the child with admiration. 'Beautiful ! upon my word, beautiful ! You are a genius, Six hundred and seventeen. Follow me.'

He led her into the shop. 'There,' he said, 'you sleep under the counter. There are blankets about to make a bed of. Only mind everything goes back into place in the morning ; nothing torn and no tickets off.'

'I understand.'

'Look at me. You see I hold a stick that I've been

whittling. Not out of ornament, I tell you, but for use. Now rack your brains for a reason.'

'To lick me with,' said the girl.

'Hit it, Six hundred and seventeen. If you tear, break, or waste anything, this stick will be a paintbrush to your back, making you like an ancient Briton, blue and yellow. Now look at this stick. You don't suppose I whittle and shape it for such as you ; you ain't worth the exertion.'

'You thought me worth ten bob, or you wouldn't have given it,' said the child.

'You worth ten shillings!' sneered the Jew ; 'not a bit. Your mother gave her gold ring as well ; that was worth six.'

'Well, then, I'm valued at four.'

'Four! You're worth nothing. I reckoned on your clothes and boots.'

'My boots are scat at the sides, and wore out at the soles. They are fit for nothing but making soup. My clothes are that dirty with mud and coals that they'll never wash clean again.'

'What! given to argufying, are you?' exclaimed the pawnbroker. 'No more of that with me. Hook up the steps if you please, you blackbeetle. I must find you a change somehow.'

He made her ascend a set of dark steps into an upper story. There they went through three rooms, full as they could hold of various goods, old furniture, clocks, china, mattresses, looking-glasses, military accoutrements, uniforms, muffs, jackets, gowns, nautical instruments, books, tools.

'There,' said he, pointing about him with his stick, 'you see all these garments. This is the uniform of a general, that of an admiral. Here are sable and sealskin jackets, rabbitskin ermine opera cloaks, silk dresses for servant-maids, and cotton prints for ladies, linen jackets of dockmen, worsted jerseys of sailors. These must all be hung on yokes. They accumulate. Unless exposed they don't attract attention. I fashion the yokes and pegs on which they hang. That is what I was whittling at. I always have one in hand. I have one great enemy with which to battle. These clothes don't eat, but they get eaten. The moth is my enemy. I said he was a great one, but really he's a very little one. Bless me! what valuable time is wasted at whack, whack, whack! with a bamboo to drive the moth out of the cloth and fur. I've tried camphor ; I've tried bitter apple ; I've tried pepper. Nothing answers

but the bamboo. Now you know what will be one of your regular duties—duties ! pleasures, exercises. You will have to beat the clothes every day for a couple of hours. If after this I find a moth I'll beat you, whack, whack, whack, with the bamboo, till I've beat the laziness out of you. You are intelligent. You can understand plain English, I suppose ?'

Joanna nodded.

'You will have to work hard in this house,' said Mr. Lazarus further. He had beaten a carpet to illustrate his meaning, and raised a cloud of dust that made him cough. 'No idleness is tolerated here. No spare hours are given during which you may slip into mischief. Not much food to fire the blood and make you want it. You will rise at five and get me a cup of coffee. No lighting of fires, mind. The coffee is made in an Etna. Then you beat the clothes in the back yard till the shop opens. About noon the fire is kindled and dinner is cooked for me. You can eat what I leave. There is often gravy in which to sop bread. Gravy is nourishing. I don't consume it all myself. I am not greedy. Children only are greedy. In the afternoon you mind the shop, and mend what clothes are torn. About five o'clock I shall want a cup of tea. I take bread and cheese for supper at nine. My teeth are bad. I don't eat the crusts and rinds; you may have them, and be grateful. There are many poor children with less. I had forgotten. You must have a change of clothes.' He looked carefully about among the female garments. 'There,' said he, 'I don't think I could dispose of these traps; they are much worn. I bought 'em cheap; came off a girl as died of scarlet fever. Look sharp; go behind a heap of furniture, off with your wet and coaly rags, and tumble into these beauties. Then, if you like, you may wash your face and hands at the pump. Water costs no money. I allow no soap.'

Joanna did not take many minutes in changing. She went into the back yard—this house had one—and soused her head and arms well. Then she returned with the utmost promptitude to her master.

'I couldn't find a comb,' she said, 'so I used a broken kitchen fork.'

'That's right,' answered the Jew approvingly; 'never ask for two things where one will suffice.'

Mr. Lazarus relaxed into amiability. He was pleased with the ready instinct of the child to meet his views.

'Let me tell you,' he said, 'when you've been a good girl,

and worked hard and eaten next to nothing, I'll allow you, as a treat, to put on the general's uniform, sword, epaulette, and all; or the admiral's, with his cocked hat; or my lady's silk and ermine, bare arms and low body. It will be as good as going to the play, and it will air the suits also, and prevent them getting mouldy.'

Joanna clapped her hands and laughed.

'There is one thing further,' said Lazarus. 'You'll have to go to bed in the dark, winter and summer. I never allow waste of candle. Who knows? you might take to reading in bed—under the counter—and set everything in a blaze. Why, bless me! if this establishment caught, the fire would run through it. Nothing in the world would arrest the flames. Now you may go down stairs. No—stay. There is one point more to particularise. I spend a penny every week in getting shaved, and fourpence a quarter in having my hair cut. That amounts to five-and-fourpence in the twelvemonth — clear waste, nothing to show for it. You will have to learn to shave me and cut my hair. Here is an old muff that the moth has played the mischief with. I don't think it will sell. Practise on that. Lather it first, and then work along it gently with a razor. You'll soon get into the way, and save me five-and-four per annum. Only—mind! Don't waste the soap!'

* * * * * * *

In all the many years that Emmanuel Lazarus had done business he had never made so good a bargain as when he took Joanna in pawn. Ten shillings! She was worth to him over ten pounds a year, that is two thousand per cent. interest. He soon discovered her worth, and congratulated himself on having secured her.

Joanna worked from grey dawn to late at night harder than any day-labourer. She slept under the counter, and slept so lightly that at the least alarm of burglars she woke and screamed loud enough to scare away the rogues, arouse the neighbours, and collect the police.

She dusted the weevils out of their lurking-places; not a grub could conceal itself under the felling; the bamboo reduced it to pulp. Not a moth could spread wing; it was clapped to dust between her palms. Wherever, in cloth, dress, or fur cloak, she spied a rent, her dexterous needle mended it so neatly that it remained unperceived by purchasers. She never forgot to lock the doors, bar and bell the windows, at

night. Her clothing cost nothing, and was always neat, so well was it washed, so neatly was it mended, darned and patched. As she was denied coals, she washed the house linen and her own garments in cold water.

When winter set in, Joanna found means of economising that had not entered the brain of Lazarus. Charitable people had instituted a soup-kitchen. The girl had gone thither with her mother in their abject poverty. She went there now clothed in rags, and brought away sufficient nourishing broth to form the staple of her own and her master's dinner. Some potatoes and bread completed the meal. No one supposed that the wretched girl with worn face and appealing eyes was the maid-of-all-work to the rich Jew pawnbroker and money-lender of the Barbican.

Joanna had dark hair and large shining dark eyes too big for her face ; the face was thin and sharp, but well cut. She was but twelve years old, therefore only a child ; but the face was full of precocious shrewdness. The eyes twinkled, gleamed, flashed. Wonderful eyes, knowing eyes, without softness in them ; eyes that saw everything, measured and valued everything, that went into those she encountered and found out their weakness. Her face was without colour, but the skin was clear and transparent.

'Who and what are you, my child?' asked a charitable woman once at the soup-kitchen.

'I'm a pawn—Six hundred and seventeen!' she replied, and disappeared.

CHAPTER IV.

JOANNA'S SCHOOL.

Seven months after Joanna had been left in pawn with Mr. Lazarus, the Yorkshire skipper was again in Plymouth with a load of coals from Goole. He came to the shop to see the girl, and tell her about her mother. Captain Hull—that was his name—had bad news to communicate. Mrs. Rosevere had probably caught cold from her immersion, when she tried to drown herself, and on her voyage northward had been taken ill. On reaching Goole, she was carried on shore and sent to

the nearest hospital, where she had been pronounced ill with rheumatic fever.

After that Mr. Hull had been to Belgium for iron. There had been a strike at Middlesborough, and the furnaces had been let out, and the ironmasters had executed their contracts by purchasing their iron at Verviers. When next Captain Hull came to Goole and inquired after the woman, he learned that she had been discharged, but whither she had gone, and what was her present address, he was unable to ascertain. Joanna was much troubled. She had a tender spot in her heart. She was passionately devoted to her mother. Not a line had reached her from Mrs. Rosevere. Whether she were alive or dead she could not tell. She cried bitterly at night under the counter, and could not sleep for sobs. But she did not allow the skipper to see her tears. She shook and turned white when he told his tale, and then fled to the kitchen to conceal her emotion.

'Ah!' said the pawnbroker, when she had disappeared, 'this is my fate. I advanced ten shillings on the child, and now she is thrown on my hands. This is the second time this sort of thing has occurred—before it was white mice.'

'What about the white mice?'

'I advanced money on a couple of white mice to a schoolboy, and was not repaid. I had to feed those mice for weeks, and they cost me a fortune. I put them in the window, but, though it brought all the Barbican children to the glass, there came no buyer. At last I was forced to drown them, to be rid of the daily burden of their maintenance. The law won't let me deal like that with children. I'll never advance money on live animals again—never. I've been bitten twice, once by the mice, now by the girl. Ten shillings! I gave a half-sovereign in gold. I shall never see the colour of the coin again.'

'Now, Mr. Lazarus, speak nobut the truth. You gave ne'er a penny in cash. It was all took out in clothes.'

'Was it? Dear me, I had forgot. Well, it does not matter. I made a bad bargain. The creature eats with a voracity perfectly appalling. Did you ever see a cow or a horse in a meadow, how it goes on, never stopping? It is just the same with this child. The cost of her food is frightful, the cost of her clothes sickening. She outgrows her dresses as fast as they are fitted on her. Why did I take her? Why was I such a fool? This is what comes of having a feeling heart. Take her away, Mr. Hull, take her away, chuck her as ballast into the bilge-

water in your hold. I've had her seven months, now it is your turn.'

'I—I!' stammered the good-natured skipper, 'I am nae responsible for t' little lass.'

'You are. You sent her here. You persuaded the mother to put her with me, and offered her a place in your vessel. As you took the mother, you're part bound for the child. Now I've had enough of her gorging herself on butcher's meat, and swilling bottled ale, and burning candles at both ends, and flaunting in silks and satins.'

'None so much o' t' latter, I take it, Mr. Lazarus.'

'Only on Sundays, I allow. But, consider, Mr. Hull, a child can neither be clothed *in* nor *on* nothing. You, by the cut of you, I take to be a married man, and know what the cost of dressing children comes to.'

'This is but one bairn.'

'I know that; but this child is a girl, and girls cost more in clothes than boys.'

'Shoo works for you.'

'Works! Not she—loiters about the Barbican playing with the boys and girls at hopscotch and prisoners' base. Works! I've paid for her schooling.'

'Does she go to t' National school?'

'National school!' jeered the Jew. 'A first-rate private school. She is slow at learning. I wish I could extract from her sufficient work to pay for her schooling. Take her away. I'll turn her out of doors if you don't. Not under half-a-sovereign would I consent to retain her.'

Mr. Hull considered for a while, then thrust his hand into his pocket and drew forth some money. 'If this be but a matter o' brass,' he said, 'take it. But I tell thee, I don't acknowledge the responsibility.'

'Very well,' said the Jew, 'I've a feeling heart, and I accept the trifle. It don't cover her breakages. I had as beautiful a pair of Oriental jars as you might wish to see. They were worth fifty pounds. The child knocked one over with a broom. What did she have a broom in her hand for? Cobwebs! Cobwebs don't hurt. Spiders break no china. Brooms does. Now there is but one jar remaining, and that is worth seven-and-six, because the pair is broken. That is a loss to a poor man. Take seven-and-six from fifty pounds, and it leaves forty-nine pounds twelve and six. You wouldn't like to lose forty-nine pounds twelve and six of a morning,

would you, Mr. Hull? You see what sacrifices one makes through having a feeling heart. Mr. Hull, I'll take the money, and set it off against the breakages: you contribute ten shillings and I forty-nine pounds twelve and six.'

Mr. Hull grew red, and fumbled in his pocket. 'Dang it!' said he, 'here's another half-sovereign.'

'Thank you, captain, thank you. You understand, it don't release her from pawn. The mother pawned her, and has the ticket.'

'Oh, I don't want t' bairn out. Keep her till her mother redeems her. I'm a'most feared though t' old lass is dead. Shoo were but a weakly creetur' at best.'

'I'll keep her till then,' said Lazarus, and added to himself, 'I wouldn't do without her for five-and-twenty pounds.'

As Mr. Lazarus said, Joanna was at school, and the school was the private establishment of Mr. Lazarus, in which he was head and second master and usher rolled into one, and in which she was the only scholar. Consequently on her was concentrated the full teaching power of the academy. She knew her letters and could sum when she came there, but her knowledge of men and the world was rudimentary. This was the speciality of Mr. Lazarus's teaching. Under his tuition she rapidly acquired an insight into the shady ways of the world and acquaintance with the skeletons in the cupboards of a good many houses in Plymouth.

Joanna also gained insight into her master's business, and unfolded a remarkable aptitude for it. The business was one that ramified in all directions, a fungous, cancerous growth with fibres extracting nutriment from every social bed.

Mr. Lazarus visited extravagant ladies at their homes, and lent them money on their diamonds. He gave out coppers on the flat-irons of drunken washerwomen. He took the gold repeaters of officers and the tools of artisans. He lent money on bills of sale, notes of hand, and post-obits. He was yielding about renewals.

The house was crowded from garret to cellar with articles of every description on which money had been advanced, or which had been seized in default of payment. A retentive memory was in demand to recollect where anything was, when wanted by a depositor, who came, money in hand, to release it; to know what pledges had lapsed, and when, without hunting them out of the ledger.

Dealers of various kinds visited Mr. Lazarus: slop-shop

men to purchase a lot of secondhand clothing, curiosity dealers to overhaul his china and engravings, jewellers for his watches and rings and bracelets, furniture-makers to buy up cracked mahogany-veneered chests of drawers for conversion into Florentine antiques by coating them with Dutch marquetry.

Thus the goods in Mr. Lazarus's establishment went into circulation. Old things went and new came. But there always remained some deposit which no tide swept away, and which lay as a burden on the Jew's mind. The articles occupied space and were unsaleable. Joanna applied her mind to the solution of this difficulty, and showed a rare sagacity in converting them into usable, and therefore saleable goods, and thus launching them.

As Joanna grew up, and grew into the business, she exhibited a rare talent in negotiating with both sellers and purchasers. She did not become the right hand of Lazarus, only because he had no right hand. Even he, with his long experience, was unable to surpass her in disparagement of articles offered, in shaming a poor pledger into yielding them for a trifle. The expressions she threw into her face, the scorn that quivered in her finger-tips, the keenness of eyesight that overlooked no defect, cowed the spirit of the pledger, and took the value out of the piece of goods before a word was spoken. On the other hand, in treating with dealers, her genius was equally conspicuous. She praised the articles, dexterously disguised their defects, flattered and cajoled the purchasers, and sent them away to find that they had been overreached. But what delighted Joanna especially was to have to do with an amateur antiquary or china fancier : then she became simplicity itself, profoundly ignorant of the real value of rare articles, and she sent the greenhorns off deluding themselves that they had secured treasures 'in a poky out-of-the-way odds-and-ends shop,' when they had paid heavy gold for utter rubbish.

Joanna, as has been said, developed admirable skill in turning unsaleable goods into articles of commerce. We give one instance. Mr. Lazarus was unable to resist the temptation of purchasing, at a low figure, a large number of scarlet uniforms slightly damaged and discoloured. No one would buy the red-cloth jackets. Joanna unpicked them, sent them into the dye-vat, and with a pair of scissors and a needle and black thread converted them into fashionable short coats. The breast of one made the tail of another.

The demand for Mr. Lazarus's Rinking, Lorne, and Brighton suits, at a price with which the ready-made dealers could not compete, soon exceeded the supply.

When one of H.M.'s vessels was put in commission the mess was furnished with new linen, plate, china, glass. When discharged—sometimes at the end of a few months—everything was sold off at miserably low prices. Mr. Lazarus was a large and constant purchaser at these sales. Sometimes he took the entire lot in a lump, by negotiation, without auction. Then he and Joanna went over all the acquisitions with care. The markings were removed from the linen. If the tablecloths were much cut, they were converted into napkins ; if slightly injured, Joanna darned and disguised the cuts. The plate was subjected to much polishing, till it bore the appearance of new, or was redipped and sold as new—possibly to the same vessel when recommissioned. The glass was sorted into complete lots ; the knives and china found their way among the poor.

In their views of life Joanna and her master agreed perfectly ; but then Joanna's mind had been formed by Mr. Lazarus, and she drank in his doctrines as freely as he let her drink water.

Mr. Lazarus was a conscientious man in a way. He instructed Joanna in morals. He taught her that great sin would lie at her door if she acted towards himself dishonestly, and untruthfully and wastefully.

They had ample opportunity for exchanging ideas whilst feather-picking.

The pawnbroker received many pillows and bed-tyes as pledges. When he did so he slit them at a seam, put in his hand and extracted feathers ; from a pillow he withdrew one handful, from a bed four. In their place he put hay, so as not to alter their weight. Then Joanna sewed up the seams so neatly that it could not be told they had been opened ; and the feathers were stored in chests to be sold at tenpence per pound. Whilst thus engaged Joanna and her master discussed the world, the profligacy of the rich, the meanness of the poor, the greed of rival pawnbrokers, the universal corruption of men and morals.

What was the world coming to, when debtors bolted to America, and when those on whose furniture Mr. Lazarus had made advances 'flitted' by moonlight, leaving him out of pocket, without power of recovery ? What was the world

coming to, when the police poked their noses into his shop, and found there stolen goods, which they carried off, in spite of his having paid hard cash for them, or were extortionate in their demand for palm-greasing, to overlook the purchases? What was the world coming to, when charitable institutions were allowed to come to the aid of the distressed—clothing-clubs, coal-clubs, savings' banks—and hold them back from flying to their proper refuge, the Golden Balls? What was the world coming to, when the Jews were becoming so numerous and so unscrupulous as to interfere with one another's business? And what was the world coming to, when Gentiles were becoming a match for Jews in plucking the geese, and shearing the silly sheep, that asked to be plucked and shorn?

Thus Joanna grew up under this schooling, and the teaching became the grain of her mind. There was natural aptitude to receive it, but the aptitude was that of an active, eager, intelligent mind, ready to assimilate any instruction given it, with daily opportunity for testing and exercising it.

She was entirely without sympathy with her fellows. She looked upon men as the prey on which the clever lived; they were fair game when brought within reach through necessity or imbecility. Of human nature she had a low opinion, but she was brought into contact with no noble specimens.

Lazarus was without tenderness towards her; she grew up with no one to love, no one to love her, consequently there was no sympathy, pity, softness about her. The one leading motive of Lazarus's life seemed to be Individualism. He thought, worked only for himself. He concerned himself about no one; he was indifferent to the sufferings of mankind. His code of ethics was based on self. That was right which did him good, that was wrong which did him harm. He insisted to Joanna that the secret of success lay in rigidly attending to self-interest; that the failures of men were due to their yielding to their good-nature, to their vibration between self-interest and the care for others.

Thus passed several years. Joanna grew in stature, and her mind accommodated itself to what was exacted of it. She became indispensable to her master, but he was too shrewd to let her see how highly he appreciated her. No further news reached the Barbican about her mother. The skipper no more returned to Plymouth.

Still Joanna clung to the belief that her mother lived, and would return and redeem her before the lapse of the seven years.

CHAPTER V.

CRUDGE, SOLICITOR.

One evening, after Mr. Lazarus had shut up shop, his private door-bell was rung sharply. Joanna answered it, but opened only so much of the door as allowed a portion of her face to appear, whilst she inquired the name and business of the visitor at so unwonted an hour.

'Crudge,' answered the caller; 'Crudge, solicitor. Come, open, and let me in. Here is my card.'

'Crudge, is it?' exclaimed Lazarus, who was behind the girl. 'Let in Mr. Crudge, Joanna, and don't keep him there under the drip of the door. Can't you see that it is raining, and that he has on his best hat? Joanna, be careful, lock and chain after the gentleman.'

Lazarus backed, bowing before his visitor, till he backed against a wall; then he stood hesitating, looking about him, doubtful whither to conduct Mr. Crudge.

'Really, sir,' said the Jew, 'I am sorry to see you in so unworthy a den; but a shop is not the rose-garden of Gulistan, and the seat of business is not the lap of luxury. Where shall we go? Will you condescend to step into the kitchen?'

'Anywhere you like,' answered the lawyer. 'No ceremony with me. Give me a chair to sit on, and a light by which to find one. I want no more.'

'There is a nice easy arm-chair, leather covered, with springs in the seat; but it is upstairs. It would take a quarter of an hour to get it down. Besides, Inchball's "British Theatre," in twenty-five vols. half-bound, the rest in paper parts, occupy the seat. Time, Mr. Crudge, is too precious a commodity with you to let us think of that thin buoyant-seated chair.'

'I will content myself with one that is cane-bottomed,' said Mr. Crudge.

'I'm afraid I must ask you to take one that *was* cane-bottomed, but is now sat through, but will be re-caned in a fortnight,' said the Jew, apologetically. 'If you don't mind taking a place between the præterite and the future tenses, nothing can be better. It is not so far gone that you will slip through. I will put a baking-tray from the oven over the hole, and then you will run no risk. Don't be afraid of grease.

Nothing fatty ever goes into my oven. If you shirk it, take the dustpan.'

Mr. Crudge did not, however, relish the appearance of the chair offered him, or the kitchen into which he was introduced. He remained standing. Joanna entered after barring the door.

'I want to see you in private,' he said; 'I have come on business. We may need a table, and pens and ink. Besides,' he added, 'the place is full of feathers, and I don't want my coat covered with down.'

Mr. Lazarus laughed. 'Joanna has been plucking geese. Roast goose for dinner to-morrow. I would invite you to partake, Mr. Crudge, but your time is precious, and my house ill-suited as a place of entertainment. Plenty of goose-plucking done in this establishment, my dear sir, I assure you.'

No goose was visible, not even a fowl, but bolsters and pillows strewed the floor, and Mr. Crudge had to step over them by the light of a tallow candle stuck in the neck of a broken brandy bottle.

'If I might be allowed to propose,' said Lazarus, 'I would suggest your following me into my sanctum sanctorum. There we can talk together alone. Not that Joanna is to be considered. Step this way, Mr. Crudge. Joanna, let me have the light. You must sit in the dark, and pluck the goose after the gentleman is gone. Take care, Mr. Crudge, solicitor, there is a broken slate in the floor. Kick that bolster aside, it lies in your way. Don't strike your head against this butcher's steel-yard. Mind the floor; there is a dozen of mineral water ranged along the wall. You may notice an unpleasant savour. It is occasioned by nothing more than a dead rat. Overrun with them; so near the water; and I have poisoned them. They die in their holes, and under floors and behind wainscots. In a fortnight the smell will be gone. Here, sir, is my little room. You will excuse the bed being in it. Here is a seat for you, Mr. Crudge. It may be peculiar, but it is not uncomfortable. In fact, it is an old sedan-chair with the front knocked out. If you will look round the room you will see sedan-chairs let in between the presses. I got a stock of them, when they went out of fashion, and lay rotting in a yard. They came in handy, fitted with shelves for keeping sundries, my papers, and poor valuables. One I use as a chair. I sit on it at the table. The sides cut off draughts. I'll turn it round. I can seat myself on the bed, if you will condescend to occupy the sedan-chair.'

Mr. Crudge looked about him. The room was small, lighted by day through a window, half of which was blocked up. Under the window was a table strewn with strips of paper, numbered—tickets to be affixed to pledges. Ink was in a broken liqueur-glass stuck into a cup full of shot. In an old dirty marmalade-pot was paste, and a brush. The paste was sour and watery. Against the wall on one side was a bedstead with a straw mattress on it, and a feather-bed to which hung a ticket. The bolster was labelled 145, the coverlet 374. Probably there were tickets to the blankets, but these Mr. Crudge did not see. Apparently no sheets were on the bed. Out of economy Lazarus used pledged goods; it saved the wear of what was his own. In the recesses on each side of the chimney were sedan-chairs, converted into cupboards. One was filled with bottles—laudanum, ipecacuanha, castor-oil, &c.

'Ah!' said Lazarus, marking the direction of his guest's eye. 'That was a bad bargain. Never able to dispose of this lot. Taken from a chemist. If either Joanna or I had been ill, and could have used some of them, the loss would not have been so dead. I keep 'em here, safe, as some of the lot may be poison.'

On the tops of the presses and sedan-chairs were boots, bottles, and crockery. On the chimneypiece were Chelsea figures. On a stool beside the table lay a scrap of newspaper, in which were a couple of onions and some salt.

Mr. Lazarus put the candle on the table, turned the chair about, and insisted on ensconcing the solicitor in it. Then he seated himself on the bed opposite his visitor.

Mr. Crudge was a tall, well-dressed man, of middle age, with reddish-brown hair. He wore whiskers and a moustache, but had his chin and jaw shaven below the moustache. He had grey eyes and a pair of bushy reddish eyebrows. His face expressed intelligence without imagination; it was a strong, practical, business face. His manner was that of a gentleman, easy and possessed. He took his place in the sedan-chair without a twitch of the muscles of his mouth. He was as insensible to the ludicrous as he was to poetry. Yet the situation was eminently grotesque. The sedan-chair had a roof and glass windows at the sides. It was open only in front, and Mr. Crudge was planted, as in a sentry-box, face to face with the Jew, sitting on the bed, with his legs folded like those of a Turk.

'Now,' said Mr. Lazarus, 'let us proceed to business.

Something of importance must have occurred to bring you here at such a time.'

'Not at all,' answered Mr. Crudge. 'Nothing of vital importance that I am aware.'

'Then why have you come?' exclaimed Lazarus, dropping his legs over the side of the bed. 'Surely a letter would have sufficed. I could have run up to town to see you. You have travelled first class; I would have gone third. You are not going to charge me for your time and trainage?'

'Make yourself easy,' said the lawyer. 'I had to come to Plymouth on other business than yours, and as I was here, I thought best to give you a call at a time when I knew you would be disengaged. I am staying at the Royal. I did my business during the afternoon, had my dinner, and then strolled down here.'

Lazarus breathed freely. 'You gave me a scare,' he said. 'What an expense I should have been put to! Staying at the Royal! Wouldn't a commercial inn have done as well? However, the other client pays, so it does not matter.'

'Not at all to you,' said Mr. Crudge with composure. 'I know your idiosyncrasies, and accommodate myself to them.'

'Quite so. When you act for bloated plutocrats, make them pay. Letting off blood does them good. When you act for poor hard-working labourers like myself, cut the expenses down. Our blood is watery.'

'Enough on a topic that leads to nothing,' said Mr. Crudge. 'You can guess what has brought me hither.'

'I am afraid to guess. Is it the affairs of the Duke?'

Crudge nodded.

'How do matters stand?'

'That depends on the point of view from which the *coup d'œil* is taken. From yours, excellent; from theirs, desperate. The family are constantly in want of money—renewing, mortgaging, and there must be a crash shortly. Now they want about five thousand towards finishing them.'

'Finishing them! Finishing for ever the great Kingsbridge family! Breaking down his most noble and exalted mightiness the Marquess of Saltcombe! Sweeping away, clearing away, and utterly effacing'—he jumped off the bed, and with the tail of his dirty coat brushed the table—'clearing away and utterly effacing the most gracious and ancient Eveleighs!'

'Mr. Lazarus,' said the solicitor coldly, craning his neck out of the box to watch the proceedings of the pawnbroker, 'pray

observe that you have upset the ink and paste over the table in your effort to clean it. Instead of mending, you have messed the table.'

'I do not care. My fancy ran away with me. I am an Oriental, a child of the sun, with a rich imagination that flashes into poetry. What care I about these noble mushrooms? They date from the Conquest, but what is the Conquest to us? An affair of yesterday. I have done. Go on. They want more money, do they?' He reascended the bed, and sat on it with legs depending over the side.

'The end must come; it is inevitable,' said the solicitor. 'Everything is in your hands. You may bring the walls about their ears when you will. If you choose, we can proceed to extremities at once. Nothing can save them. You are practically the sole creditor, for you have got the home mortgages into your own hands. You have no rivals to contend against. The estate must be sold, and if you choose to become possessor of Court Royal you may.'

Lazarus rubbed his hands, and crowed, rather than laughed.

'I—I have the estates! What good would they do to me? I set up as a grand English squire! Not I. That is not my ambition. I have Court Royal! I could not keep it up.'

'Well, there is no accounting for tastes. For the *coup de grâce* we must have five thousand pounds. As usual, I suppose, the money is to go through a third party, so that your name may not appear? I will manage that. I suppose some debts are pressing, and the usual annual expense is becoming burdensome—that is the occasion of this fresh demand.'

'Mr. Crudge,' said the Jew, 'you seem confident that the end is near. I do not share your confidence. A great house like that of the Duke of Kingsbridge will not go to pieces all at once. It has its supports, on all sides, in rich and powerful families. When the rumour spreads that the Kingsbridge house is trembling, the noble relations from all parts will hasten to uphold it. There are a thousand means to which such a family may have recourse, inaccessible to such as us. They are like a tent pegged all round into the soil, and if this or that guy snaps, what does it matter?—the rest will hold.'

'Who are to help them? The central pole of your tent is sawn through, and the guys will not uphold a fallen and flapping mass of rag. They stay it while upright, but are worthless when it is down.'

'But the house is not down yet. Why, Lord Edward is

rector of a fat Somersetshire living, an archdeacon, and Canon of Glastonbury.'

'He may be worth some twelve hundred at the outside. He cannot help. Besides, he is already in debt. Lord Ronald, the general, has only his half-pay.'

'But the family of the late Duchess?'

'They will do nothing. However, I do not see in what way their fall can concern you, so long as you save your shekels. Whether the survivors of the wreck come to land or sink—that is nothing to you or me.'

'Nothing to me!' exclaimed the Jew, jumping off the bed and pacing the room. 'Nothing to me! It is everything to me. What do I care for money except as a means whereby I may lever them over, and throw them in the dirt under my feet?' He stopped abruptly, thinking he had said too much, and looked at the solicitor out of the corners of his eyes; but Mr. Crudge was leaning back in the sedan-chair, and Lazarus could see only his profile in shadow through the glass side.

'You speak as though you entertained a spite against the family,' he said—'as though you were moving in this matter, actuated by revenge for some personal wrong. But that is impossible. What can you, the mole that burrows at the root of the social tree, have against the purple emperor butterfly who flutters about its very top on shining wing? The distance between you is too great for you ever to have come in contact.'

'To be sure, I have expressed myself over-strongly. My feeling is not personal, it is political.'

'Oh!' said the lawyer. 'Now I understand.'

'Of course you understand. Political feelings fire the passions as surely as personal wrongs.'

'To be sure they do,' said Crudge, with indifference.

After a pause, Lazarus got off his bed and said, 'If five thousand more is necessary, you shall have the sum. I have waded too deep into the morass to think of retreat; I must wade on. Tell me candidly: in your opinion, is there no salvation for them?'

'That I will not say. There is a desperate resource. The Marquess may marry an heiress, and with her fortune disencumber the property.'

'He is capable of doing it,' cried Lazarus in great excitement. 'He will do it; curses be upon him! Why, any American plutocrat, or Liverpool merchant, or London corn-factor would throw his millions into the Kingsbridge chat-moss

to make a way over it for his daughter to win a coronet. The Marquess is only forty, is a handsome man—that will be the checkmate they will play!'

'The Marquess is forty, as you say, or thereabouts. He has been languidly looking out for heiresses these ten years, but heiresses don't fly into your mouth like roast partridges in the land of Cockaigne. He must stalk them. He must make efforts to find them. However, that is no concern of mine. All I have to look to is your pecuniary interest in the Kingsbridge estates.'

'Five thousand will nigh upon finish them up, will it?' said the Jew. 'They take a deal of finishing, like a painting by Meissonier. I thought the last loan would have done that. What is the property worth? Have you an idea? What are the old mortgages on the other estates?'

'That is more than I can say. I know what is owing to you. You have the mortgage on the manor of Court Royal, the sun and centre of the whole system.'

Lazarus considered, then drew a key from his pocket, opened an iron box walled into the side of the house, and drew from it an account-book and his cheque-book.

'Now,' said Mr. Crudge, 'see the result of getting excited. You upset the ink, and now you want to use it.'

'If you do not mind being left a moment in the dark, I will fetch some ink,' answered the Jew. 'I see that what lies on the table is useless; it is a flux of coalash, ink, and paste; a picture of our social system, eh, Mr. Crudge!—a mixture of messes.'

Lazarus withdrew with the candle.

Mr. Crudge sat back in his chair and crossed his legs. A very little grey light stole in through the upper part of the window.

'Bah!' said he to himself. 'This sort of people object to fresh air. What with the onions, and the sour paste, and the dead rats, and the pervading Levitical savour, I am asphyxiated. No washing apparatus in the room, I perceive. I should have perceived it without a light.' Then he heard soft steps approach. The door was thrown open and feet entered the room. In another moment a match was struck and flared. Mr. Crudge, who had turned his head, saw through the window of the sedan-chair that the girl stood in the room. Joanna came forward and held the match before his face, studying him intently. She said nothing. Mr. Crudge was too surprised to

speak. He looked at her. She was a girl of about seventeen, tall, slightly built, with olive complexion, very dark hair, and large shrewd eyes. The match flame repeated itself in them as red stars. She had outgrown her garments, which were too tight and too short. Her arms were bare. She was in her stocking-soles. Her lips were compressed; she remained immovable till the match burnt to her fingers; then, instead of throwing the red end on the ground, she extinguished it in her mouth. She said not a word, but turned in the dark and went away as softly as she had come.

Presently Lazarus came back with the candle in one hand and a bottle of ink in the other.

'I could not remember where I had put it,' he said; 'at last I found the ink in the howdah.'

'In the what?'

'There was an elephant brought over from India for a showman a few years back, and the howdah was brought over with it. Sixpence a ride, children half price, would soon have recouped the howdah and the beast. But it was not to be. It was to be dead loss. Such is life! The elephant died on board ship, and the howdah was sold. I bought it, but have not yet been able to dispose of it. Do you happen to want a howdah?'

'Certainly not?'

'You needn't pay cash down,' said the Jew. 'You'd deduct the howdah from your bill. Perhaps you'll consult your missus about it when you get home.'

The Jew put candle and ink on the table.

'I've been considering,' he said, 'that it would be well for you to go down to Court Royal and have a look at the place and the people. Then you will be able to give me an account of how the land lies. I can't go myself; I have my loan office, as well as the shop, and I can't leave the girl to manage both.'

'A queer piece of goods she seems,' said the lawyer.

'That she is; queer here,' said the Jew, touching his head; 'an idle minx with an egregious appetite. Eats everything, even the candle-ends. But enough of her; she has nothing to do with Court Royal, and never will have. What do you say to my proposal?'

'I can't travel and spend valuable time without proper remuneration.'

'You shall be paid,' answered the Jew. 'I will not grudge a small sum in this instance. I shall be easier in my mind

when you have been down to the place and taken stock of what is there. You see, I've had myself to lean on friends to find all the money I wanted; if they pay me—they at Court Royal—it is not all profit. I have to pay interest also for what I took up to help me to get hold of the main mortgages. There,' he continued, 'is the difference between us Jews and you Christians. We hang together like a swarm of bees, one holding on by another; and you are like a hive of wasps, stinging each other, and when one gathers honey the other eats it, so that their combs are always empty. Will you go to Court Royal?'

'I will. Indeed, it is as well that I should have a personal interview with the steward, as the negotiations are carried on through him.'

'You will travel second class, not first,' entreated Lazarus. 'Money spent on the railway in comfort is waste. From Kingsbridge Road there is a coach. You will travel outside. The inside places are secured several days in advance. If you return the next day you need not tip the driver two shillings; eighteenpence will suffice.'

'Very well; I will go to-morrow.'

CHAPTER VI.

THE DUCAL FAMILY.

In the afternoon of the next day the coach deposited Mr. Crudge at the principal inn of Kingsbridge, 'The Duke's Arms.' After depositing his valise and securing a room, he ordered a fly to take him to the steward, who, he ascertained, lived out of the town, near the park gates. 'An open carriage,' said Mr. Crudge; 'it don't seem likely to rain, and I like to look about me.'

The drive was not a long one, through a pleasant wooded vale, commanding glimpses of the inlet of sea, now that the tide was flowing, flushed with water. The hills and moors over which the coach had run from the station had been bare, and the contrast of the luxuriant vegetation and stately growth of trees in the hollows was therefore the more striking and agreeable.

The carriage drew up before a neat white house, with a

green veranda, and roses and westeria trained over it. Here lived Mr. Christopher Worthivale, steward of the Duke of Kingsbridge.

A maid answered the bell, and informed Mr. Crudge that the steward was at home and disengaged. She showed him into a drawing-room which, though well furnished, looked as if it were never used. The walls were white, with gold sprigs, the carpet very green, the table cover and the covering of the chairs greener still. The window curtains lace, stiff with starch, and smelling of it. On the wall, over the fireplace, was a proof engraving of His Grace, Beavis, seventh Duke of Kingsbridge ; against the fireplace—there was no fire, and no appearance of there ever having been one—a banner screen of needlework, glazed, representing the ducal arms, with supporters and coronet. On the table was an album, containing photographs, at which Mr. Crudge looked whilst waiting First came His Grace, in cabinet size ; then one of Lord Edward, Rector of Sleepy Hollow, Canon of Glastonbury, and Archdeacon of Wellington ; one of General Lord Ronald Eveleigh, K.C.B. ; one of Lady Grace Eveleigh, and one of the Marquess of Saltcombe. Then two blank pages, with places never occupied, and after that, at a respectful distance, photographs taken from faded daguerreotypes of the late Mr. and Mrs. Worthivale, parents of the present steward. The late Mr. Worthivale had been steward to the last, and penultimate, and the present duke ; a stout, grey-haired old gentleman, in a white beaver, with high collars, and a plaid waistcoat. The old gentleman had probably possessed blue eyes. They had not taken in the daguerreotype, and consequently had not reappeared in the carte, but both insisted emphatically on the plaid of the waistcoat, as if this was, taken all in all, the thing about Mr. Worthivale, senior, which demanded perpetuation. Judging from her photograph, Mrs. Worthivale must have been a cast-iron woman, in black silk that also looked like iron, with twisted iron wire for curls. After these portraits followed those of Mr. Christopher Worthivale ; of his deceased wife, a sweet, patient-looking woman ; of his son Beavis, called after the duke, who had graciously condescended to stand godfather; and of his daughter Lucy. On a cabinet stood a beautiful carved alabaster vase, with swans, forming the handles, drinking out of it, under a glass bell. Into the pedestal of ebony was let a silver plate, on which was engraved a notice that this vase was presented

to Mr. Christopher Worthivale by his Grace, Beavis, seventh Duke of Kingsbridge, G.C.B., as a small testimonial of esteem, on the twenty-fifth anniversary of his stewardship. Above this hung a painting in oils, by a local artist, of Court Royal; and on each side of it a portrait, also in oils, the one of a favourite horse of the late Duke, the other of a favourite dog of the late dowager Duchess.

Mr. Christopher Worthivale entered, whilst Mr. Crudge was studying these pictures. He was a hale, fresh-coloured man of about five-and-fifty, in a light grey coat and a white waistcoat. He entered briskly, rubbing his hands. Judging by his appearance and manner, one would have supposed that the property of the Duke was in a flourishing and unencumbered condition, and that the steward's management of it had been most successful. Not a shadow lay on his cheerful face. His manner was perfectly easy. On his left-hand little finger he wore a ring with a red cornelian, on which were cut the three pheons of Worthivale of Worthivale, an old respectable Cornish family which he claimed to represent.

'Allow me to introduce myself,' said Mr. Crudge. 'My name is familiar to you—Crudge, solicitor, Exeter. I have come on business about which we have had some correspondence.'

'Ah! Mr. Crudge, to be sure. The maid got hold of your name wrong. I did not anticipate the pleasure. Gooche was what she said. Pray take a seat. Neither your name nor business are strange to me. Mutual accommodation, eh? Do sit down. Really, I am delighted to see you. You could not have done me a greater pleasure.'

The expression of Mr. Worthivale's face belied his words. On hearing the name of his visitor some of his cheerfulness had faded from his countenance and his lips twitched.

'I entreat you to be seated,' he went on, nervously offering one chair, then another, then, noticing an arm-chair, rolling that up, then falling back on a fourth, a low light seat of *papier maché*. 'You have come a long way. By coach? May I offer you refreshments?'

'Thank you, I will not take anything. My time is precious. If you have no objection, I would like at once to proceed to business.'

'Oh! business,' echoed Mr. Worthivale, taking out his pocket-handkerchief, and dusting the books on the table. 'Dear me! how provoking the servants are. They take advantage of there being no lady in the house to neglect the primary

obligations of domestic service. I cannot see to everything—his Grace's affairs and the dusting of my drawing-room. I beg your pardon, what was the business on which you wished to consult now?'

'That mortgage held by the Messrs. Stephens. It must be paid, I understand. It is called up. There is a little difficulty, I am led to suppose, some tightness——'

'Nothing to speak of, nothing at all,' interrupted the steward airily. 'Of course we can find the money. We can offer such excellent security, that it can always be got. You are certain you will take nothing? Not some claret?'

'Excuse me, I should like to settle this matter at once. I believe the interest has been falling in arrear. I have called on Messrs. Stephens. They do not wish any scandal; the sum is, comparatively, not large. All Messrs. Stephens want is their money, and I have a client who will advance it, the mortgage to be transferred to him.'

'That is exactly what I should propose,' said the steward, drawing a long breath. 'All we require to clear off these encumbrances is delay. A calling in of the sums standing on the estates would be inconvenient just at present. The seasons have been bad of late—five detestable years; several farms are thrown on our hands, and we have no tenants offering; others we have had to reduce to keep them occupied. The old-fashioned seasons must return eventually—a matter of time only. Then we shall be afloat again. That little sum about which I wrote——?'

'Five thousand. That will also be lent by my client on note of hand at five per cent.'

'Who is this client, may I ask?'

'A Mr. Emmanuel.'

'Emmanuel!' echoed the steward, moving uneasily on his chair. 'I must say I do not relish the idea of being so deeply indebted to Jews. Unfortunately we are already somewhat teased with them. The Marquess, when he was in the army, was rather reckless. It lasted a few years, and then he learned discretion; but when sowing wild oats he bought his grain of bad seedsmen.'

'Indeed, are the debts serious?'

'Oh, no! not at all—not for a marquess, heir to a ducal estate. We only want him to clear these off. Emmanuel! Who is this Emmanuel? He seems to be getting a much tighter grip on us than I like. First one thing, then another, goes to Mr.

Emmanuel. You see this present mortgage is a very important one, it is on the manor of Kingsbridge. He holds that on Court Royal already. Who is this Emmanuel?'

'A client who wants safe investment in land. He is trustee to an orphan, and must put the money where it can be secure. What security better than his Grace's property?'

Mr. Worthivale considered a moment; then he said, 'You will allow me to talk the matter over first with the Marquess. You are aware, no doubt, that his Grace is getting on for eighty years, and unable to devote his attention to business—except quite subsidiary matters—partly on account of his advanced age, partly because he suffers from heart complaint, and must be spared excitement. The Marquess looks after things for him—that is, he is supposed to do so, and he does sometimes. I am in his confidence. Indeed, I am his most trusted adviser. I act for the best, always in the interests of the family, but I consult the Marquess in everything, and he does me the honour, sometimes, of listening to me, and quite devoting his mind to what I suggest.'

Crudge nodded, but said nothing.

'Your time, I think you said, was precious. You will probably be returning to Exeter to-morrow.'

'To-morrow afternoon.'

'Then the business will have to be settled as soon as may be. Let me see—— Have you a dress coat with you?'

'In my portmanteau at the inn.'

Mr. Worthivale drew a sigh of relief. 'That simplifies matters. If you see no reason against it, I will send a note up to the Marquess' (really it was down hill all the way to Court Royal, nevertheless with Mr. Worthivale it was *up*). 'I will ask if I may take you there to dine to-night, quite *en famille*, you understand. There are only Lord Ronald, and Lord Edward, and the Vicar, and a neighbour or two there. Half-past seven is the hour. Will you return to Kingsbridge, and get on your evening dress, and drive back? You can come here, pick me up, and we will go on together. You are positive you have a dress suit with you?—I couldn't, you understand—without——'

'Set your mind at rest. I have dress clothes with me.'

'I am so thankful to hear it; I thought it possible you had not. When travelling on business we don't always care to cumber ourselves with superfluous luggage, you understand. To-day is his Grace's birthday, and Lord Edward has come

from Somersetshire to see the Duke and to dine with him. Lord Ronald lives at Court Royal. There are no others, but the Vicar and a neighbouring squire or two. I was invited as a devoted adherent to the family. Very kind. Also my son Beavis, who has the honour of being his Grace's godchild. My daughter, Lucy, is companion to Lady Grace. They were brought up together, and Lucy lives at the Court. Dear me! Bless my soul! The housemaid has left the duster in the room, stuffed it under the fender, and thinks it out of sight. As I am alive, there are the stove brushes also. Under the circumstances, you understand, if you had been without a dress coat'—he looked down at Mr. Crudge's feet—'and patent-leather boots?'

'I have slippers and red silk stockings.'

'They will do. Quite the thing. I feel so light of heart. You are supplied in every other particular? I should be so proud——?'

'I always take about with me paper collars, cuffs, and dickies.'

'Paper! Dickies!' echoed Mr. Worthivale. 'You will excuse me, I know—but I hardly like to—that is, I hardly think that—in a word, I would not for the world show any disrespect to his Grace, especially on his birthday. You see a duke stands at the very summit of the social scale—next to Royalty. Archbishops only go before by order of precedence, but that is a relic of pre-Reformation priestcraft which set the Church above the State. An archbishop may be any Jack or Tom. You will not take it amiss if I offer to lend you one of my shirts.'

'Not at all; not at all.'

'And you will not fail to be here at seven.'

'I will not fail.'

Mr. Crudge, as a lawyer, was punctual. Precisely at seven his fly drew up at Mr. Worthivale's door, and the steward joined him.

'Do you see,' asked the steward, as a woman in a scarlet cloak opened the gates of the drive, 'all the females who appear in the grounds are expected to wear old-fashioned red cloth cloaks and hoods? His Grace supplies them at Christmas. The effect is charming among the green shrubs and on the shaven lawns. Do look about you at the trees. Are not these araucarias superb? I believe these were the first planted in England. The mildness of the climate and the fertility of the

soil have made them thrive. Look at the hydrangeas. Did you ever see anything like them? Blue, all blue, owing to the iron in the soil. The rhododendron and azalea season is the time to see this place to perfection. The two-mile drive between banks of flowering shrubs is scarcely to be surpassed. I should have liked to take you through the vineries, orchard houses, pinery, and conservatories. The Duke and the Lady Grace are passionately fond of flowers. He grudges no money on his gardens and glass houses. You like this gravelled road, do you not? We have to send to the Tamar copper-mines for the gravel. It comes in barges from Morwellham to Kingsbridge. It is so charged with mundic and arsenic as to poison the weeds for seven years. It comes rather costly, but there is no gravel like it, a beautiful white spar. His Grace can endure no other gravel. We have some six miles of gravelled walks and drives done with it in the park and gardens. You have a pair of gloves with you, I hope? I myself wear them until I enter the room, lest my fingers should get dirty. Are your hands moist? Hold them against the glass to cool them. I do not myself like shaking hands when my hands are warm. There, from this point you get a lovely glimpse of the estuary and the beautiful hills behind, with the tower of Stokenham on the height. It is too dark for you to distinguish the tower, but you can see the water. I call the creek an estuary, but, as a fact, no rivers run into it. The Avon flows away behind that bank of hill. There is the Court: a fine pile of buildings, is it not? all built of Yealmton limestone. I call it limestone, but, in fact, it is marble. By this light you cannot see how prettily it is veined. The late Duke began the mansion, and the present Duke completed it, about forty-three years ago. It is in the Doric order.'

'It must have cost a pot of money,' observed Mr. Crudge.

'It cost a great deal of money,' said the steward coldly. 'Dukes do not keep their money in pots, like old women.'

'Is it paid for?' asked the lawyer.

'Well——. It is rather unfortunate that their Graces were obliged to build, but, really, they could not help themselves. The old house was Elizabethan, very suitable for a country squire or for a baronet. I am not sure that even a baron might not have put up with it, but it was not of a scale —of a sort—it had not the height' (Mr. Worthivale spread his hands illustrative of its dimensions) 'you understand. A duke is a duke, and must be ducally lodged. If you have a

sun, you must have a firmament to contain it. Even the dome of St. Paul's would be ridiculous. You understand.'

The fly drew up under the Doric portico, and the steward and his companion were received into the house by men in the ducal livery of buff and scarlet.

An expression of humility and of piety diffused itself over the face of Mr. Worthivale as he ascended the broad marble staircase, thickly carpeted, towards the drawing-room. Crudge was not oppressed nor surprised at what he saw. He looked round him with curiosity. The entrance-hall was stately, with polished marble pillars and pilasters. It was lighted by a chandelier. Beautiful paintings adorned the walls. Footmen in buff and scarlet flitted about like moths on a hot day.

Mr. Worthivale whispered, 'Yonder is a Gainsborough, of Lady Selena Eveleigh, afterwards Countess of Grampound. This is a Rubens—splendid colouring. But you should see those at Kingsbridge House, Piccadilly. Pity they are so fleshy that really a curtain over them is needed. The subject of this I do not understand. It is allegorical. Hush! here we are.'

They were conducted through the state drawing-room, which was lighted, but empty, into a smaller room, whence they heard the sound of voices. This was a charming boudoir, white and gold, with rose silk curtains and rose satin coverings to the sofas and chairs. In a large easy-chair by the fire sat his Grace the Duke of Kingsbridge, a tall, white-haired, noble-looking man, with a high ivory forehead, a pale transparent complexion, caused by the disease from which he suffered, his eyes dark and piercing. His face was oval, his features finely modelled, the nose aquiline, but not so much as to give the idea of strength to his face. The face was refined, dignified, and cold. It wanted vigour, but was modelled with inflexible obstinacy.

Lord Ronald, the general, was like him, but richer in colour, and his features were bolder. He was erect, decided in his movements, and looked what he was, a soldier. His hair was grey, and he wore grey whiskers and moustache. Lord Edward, the Archdeacon of Wellington, was a smaller man than his brother, grey headed, with a sallow complexion, much wrinkled. His eyes were wanting in brilliancy, and his face bore an expression of nervous timidity. He had lost his front teeth, and this had altered the shape of his mouth, and given him a look less aristocratic than his brothers.

The Marquess of Saltcombe, who was also in the room, was a handsome man of about forty, with dark hair, dark eyes, and military moustache. The rest of his face was shaven. His eyes were fine, but wanting in fire ; indeed, the general expression of his face lacked animation. He was grave, dignified, with a pleasant smile, which he put on when spoken to, but the smile never mounted to his face spontaneously. He laughed without merriment, argued without enthusiasm, pitied without sympathy, and acted without impulse. He had been in the army, but had left it ; not caring for political life he had not attempted to enter Parliament. He lived at home, was too inert to go to town, and entered without eagerness into country pursuits.

Other gentlemen were present, but Mr. Crudge did not notice them particularly. Among the ladies present the only one who was conspicuous was Lady Grace Eveleigh, the daughter of the Duke. She was tall, like the rest of the family, and had the family refinement and nobility of type ; but to this was added great purity and sweetness, and a very gentle, almost pleading manner. Mr. Worthivale introduced the lawyer to the Marquess, who was nearest to the door, and was apparently expecting their arrival. Then Lord Saltcombe took on himself the task of introducing Mr. Crudge to his father and uncles and sister. The Duke slightly rose from his seat and bowed with courtesy, but without encouragement ; Lord Edward held out his hand, and made some general remark, his kind face relaxing into a friendly expression. Lord Ronald shook hands and said a few words. The lawyer felt that, although he had moved in all sorts of society, he was as a fish out of water here. The brothers looked on him as a stranger from another sphere, whose presence must be tolerated, who would never rise even to the level of acquaintanceship. The Duke exchanged a few words with him on the weather, and the drive from the station, and on the prospect of a branch line being made to Kingsbridge, 'which,' said he, 'I shall oppose,' and then turned to the vicar and Sir Edward Sheepwash, and continued with them a conversation which had been interrupted by the introduction of Mr. Crudge.

The Marquess and Worthivale engaged him in desultory talk, and after a while shook him off. Then Lady Grace, seeing that the lawyer looked ill at ease, drew towards him, and provoked a conversation as lively as was possible under the conditions of their having no points in common.

'Let me introduce you to my dearest friend, my almost sister, Miss Lucy Worthivale,' said Lady Grace; 'and perhaps you will take her in to dinner?'

Miss Worthivale was a pretty young lady, with bright colour and large, soft, dark eyes. Her face brimmed with good-nature. It was, perhaps, a little flat and moon-shaped, but its effect was sunny. Her eyes were everywhere. Mr. Crudge saw that she was made useful in the house in many ways to relieve Lady Grace of irksome duties, and stand between her and annoyances.

Crudge observed that her attention was generally directed to Lady Grace, whom she evidently admired and loved with her whole soul. Lady Grace occasionally caught her friend's eye during dinner, smiled, and then a flush of pleasure kindled the honest face of Lucy. Because his companion looked so much towards the end of the table, the solicitor found his eyes also wandering in the same direction. Lady Grace was clearly not very young. Mr. Crudge conjectured that her age was about five-and-twenty; but though not a girl, her pure face was luminous with the light of a child's innocence. The complexion was transparently white, with a little colour that came and went as a flicker in her cheek, and yet it was so faint and doubtful that it was difficult to say whether what flickered there was colour or a smile. There was something almost sad and appealing to pity in her eye and mouth; yet Lady Grace had known no sorrow, had met with no contradiction. Her life had been unclouded and unvexed. Her mouth was flexible, fine, and tremulous; her voice soft, low, and sweet.

Mr. Crudge was a man utterly without idealism. He could read no poetry except Crabbe. Yet he could hardly withdraw his eyes from her face. She fascinated even the commonplace man of business. She puzzled him. He thought within his mind how he should get on with her if he had business transactions with her. Women's minds, as he believed, were made up of so much care about servants, so much about dress, so much solicitude about the goings on of their neighbours, a screwyness about money, a pinch of good nature, and a spice of spite, all stirred up together till well mixed. But there was nothing of this in the face before him. He shook his head; it was like the dish before him, made up of unknown ingredients.

Beside her on one side sat the Vicar, an elderly and gentlemanly man, with views like a rose of wax, to be moulded by

any man who put his hand to it and thumbed it. He was so much of a gentleman that he would differ with no one. Next him sat a young man who was speaking to no one, and was only occasionally addressed by Lady Grace, who, with ready tact, saw that he was out of the conversation.

'That is my brother,' said Lucy, in answer to a query of the solicitor. 'There was no lady for him to take in to dinner. He has been in a lawyer's office. Papa thought it a good training for him. Of course he will be steward after papa. His Grace did us the favour of standing as his godfather. I fancy he would rather not have been here this evening, though he is quite at home in Court Royal, but my father pressed him to come.'

Crudge looked across at him with interest. Here, at all events, was a man who belonged to his world—who felt uncomfortable, out of place, in the sphere in which he found himself.

When the ladies withdrew, he moved his glass, so as to be opposite him and enter into conversation, but found the steward come up beside him and engage him.

'The Lady Grace,' said Mr. Worthivale, 'is very lovely. Do you not think so? We are all her worshippers here—from a distance, looking up at her as an unapproachable star.'

'A little *passée*, eh?'

'Not at all, not at all,' said Worthivale, colouring. 'She is a most charming person.'

'I should suppose so,' answered the solicitor.

'And the Duke? You have had some conversation with him. I heard the weather and the branch spoken of. A commanding intellect. A most charming person; wonderful man for his age. Seventy-six to-day, and in full command of his faculties.'

'Obstinate, eh?'

'Not at all—firm,' said Worthivale with a frown. When he says a thing he sticks to it. You see that Lord Edward is a delicate man. He had not the physique of the rest, that was why he was put into the Church. Yet it was a pity, as his intellectual powers are considerable, and he might have done well in the diplomatic service. A most charming man. Lord Ronald is a fine old soldier; was in the Crimean war, where he distinguished himself. A man full of information on all military matters—perfectly charming. You have, I believe, had a chat or two with the Marquess; he is now talking to my son. They have known each other since boyhood, and there

is almost the attachment of friendship between them—as far as friendship can subsist between two so widely removed in the social scale. I hope that eventually my son will succeed to the stewardship. Of course he is young now, and the affairs demand an old head——' He paused, and moved uneasily. 'Altogether the Marquess is a most charming man.'

'Quite so,' said Mr. Crudge.

'There is our Vicar,' pursued the steward. 'An agreeable person, but tiresome. To-morrow he will dine with a gentleman of means, but no birth, in the town, and be quite Liberal, if not Radical, when his feet are beneath his mahogany. He leads a life of it; he is pulled this way and that by the ladies of his congregation, who have their various and discordant views.'

'That,' said Mr. Crudge, 'strikes me as the weakness of the Church of England. She is trying to balance herself between two stools, a position neither dignified nor secure.'

'Still,' said the steward, 'with this abatement he is a charming man.' Then he held up his finger: 'His Grace is speaking.'

'I do not myself see how we can escape a complete political and social revolution,' said the Duke to the Vicar, Sir Edward Sheepwash, and the Archdeacon of Wellington. 'If the franchise is entrusted to the Have-nots, the Haves must go down. They must go down for this reason——'

'Which is the Ducal family?' whispered Crudge. 'Haves or Have-nots, or Have and Have-not in one?'

'Hush,' said Worthivale.

'They must go down for this reason, that the appeal to the electors will be an appeal to Cerberus, and Cerberus must be given cakes. Now, it is absurd to affect indignation against bribery and corruption in boroughs, and yet extend the franchise to the needy. If the needy have the franchise, you must appeal to their cupidity. It is the only appeal they can understand. The new class of electors are earthworms, all stomach. Whichever party desires to get into power must appeal to their cupidity, or for evermore stand out of power. Hitherto bribery has meant the candidate throwing away his own money; henceforth he will throw away that of others, and that will not be bribery. I bribe the electors of Kingsbridge if I allow them to shoot rabbits over my preserves. I do not bribe if I promise them the land of the aristocracy and the tithes of the Church.'

'Already,' said the Archdeacon, 'the farmers are crying out that they are crushed by the rates.'

'Very well,' said the Duke; 'let the Liberals go to the country with the offer of disestablishment and disendowment, the tithe to go to cover the rates and relieve the farmers, and you will see the farmers to a man will turn Radical.'

'If the Church were disestablished we should have to become definite,' said the Vicar, a white-haired, round, red-faced, good-natured man. 'I cannot imagine anything more disastrous to the Church than to become definite.'

'The House of Lords will never pass disestablishment,' said the Archdeacon.

'The House may go too,' said the Duke.

'The country is gone crazed,' said the General, 'or it would not have endured the short-service system. What should you say to those who trained men to be carpenters, or engineers, or lawyers, and, as soon as they had mastered their professions, told them to get about their business and take to something else?'

The Duke sighed: 'I may not live to see it, but the House of Lords will go.'

'And with it the Church will fall,' said the Archdeacon.

'The army is gone to the dogs already,' said the General.

Mr. Crudge leaned across the table, and said to Beavis Worthivale: 'I see by the direction of your eyes you are trying to decipher an inscription over the chimney-piece that has been puzzling me. I am too shortsighted to read it from where I sit.'

'It is the motto of the family,' said the young man, 'written all over the house—"*Quod antiquatur et senescit, prope interitum est.*"'

'Scripture, eh?'

'Yes, Scripture. "That which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away."'

'Very good—very appropriate. "*Prope interitum est.*"'

CHAPTER VII.

BEAVIS.

'I REALLY think,' said Mr. Crudge, as he stood in the hall, being helped into his overcoat, and while the fly was at the

door to take him to his inn—'I really think, as it is dry underfoot, that I will walk to Kingsbridge. The night is lovely, the moon is full, and I have a pair of goloshes in my greatcoat pocket.'

'I will accompany you, if you have no objection,' said Beavis Worthivale. 'I also would enjoy the walk. My father can return in your fly. He is without an overcoat, and he will not lock up till I reappear.'

'Is Miss Worthivale coming?'

'Lucy? Oh, no! She lives at the Court, and only visits at the Lodge,' answered Mr. Worthivale. 'We see little of her. She is always with the Lady Grace.'

'If you are ready,' said Mr. Crudge to the young man, 'I am at your service.'

The night was indeed lovely. The moon hung unclouded over the sea, which gleamed in vistas opened among the trees of the park. Myrtles, magnolia, geraniums luxuriated in the warm, equable climate of the south coast, uncut by east winds, unchecked by late frosts. Above, the silver moon, walking in brightness; below, Mr. Crudge, walking in his goloshes. Mr. Crudge turned and looked back at Court Royal. The moon was on the front of the mansion. It was a noble pile of buildings, worthy of the residence of a duke. Behind rose hills covered with oak and beech woods, interspersed with Scottish fir and silver pines. In the moonlight, with the lighted windows, and the bank of park trees behind, it resembled a beautiful ivory sculpture, studded with golden points, reposing in a bed of black velvet.

But Mr. Crudge had no thought of the loveliness of the scene. 'To live in a place like this,' said he, 'and in this style, a man should have forty or fifty thousand, and the family have not that—clear. It is the poorest ducal house in England. You seem to me down here to go by contraries. You have an estuary without a river, a Kingsbridge without a bridge, a ducal state kept up without a ducal estate on which to keep it up.'

Beavis did not reply. Crudge turned and looked at him. The moon was full on the young man's face; it was clouded, and his eyes were on the ground.

'You and I belong to the law alike,' said Crudge; 'you are peeling your potato and I am eating at the floury ball, that is the difference. Hope you'll soon get your teeth in.'

'I am in the office of the Duke's lawyer in town; but I am not to continue in a solicitor's office.'

'Why not? The affairs of the family will give you plenty of occupation. Believe me, my boy, there are more pickings to be got out of tottering than standing houses.'

Young Worthivale walked on without answering. He struck a match and lighted a cigar.

'The parrots in Jamaica used to eat nuts,' said Crudge, 'in the days of their ignorance. They have learned to do better for themselves now. They put their claws into the wool of a sheep and swing themselves, bob, bob, bob, against the side of the creature till with their beaks they get at the fat about the kidney, and they make their repast off that. Better than nuts that, eh? You've your hold on a fat wether; I wish I had your place. All I can say is, bob, bob, bob, till you get at the fat!'

Beavis said nothing, but set his lips tight on his cigar and puffed rapidly.

'I must confess,' said Crudge, 'that what I have seen to-day will remain with me as long as I live. What a remarkable family! The dignity, stateliness, old-worldishness of the lot makes them interesting. They belong to the past. I seem to have come out of Madame Tussaud's, and to have seen wax-work notabilities. I hope you are not offended; I mean no offence. Do you remember the story in the "Arabian Nights" of the man—a Kalendar, I dare say—who got into a palace where everyone was petrified except a prince, who was semi-petrified? I feel like that Kalendar. I am not sure that you are not half-fossilised also. I do not see how anyone can live in this enchanted atmosphere and not be enchanted.'

'I see what you mean,' said young Worthivale. 'You are right, the atmosphere in Court Royal is not that of the nineteenth century, but of the last.'

'There are different atmospheres at different levels,' said Crudge. 'Theirs is too exalted for me. At the top of Mont Blanc men's ears and noses bleed; and I have had great oppression there aloft. I breathe freer now I am down again with you. But you—you belong to the upper crust, after a fashion!'

'Yes,' said Beavis, laughing, 'after the fashion of the pigeon in the pie; it has its feet there, but the feet only. I was at table to-day, but not one of the family. My father and sister belong to this exclusive world; they have been like

sponges, they have sucked in the surrounding element. They share the views, the prejudices, the delusions of the family and class. To you, what you have seen this day is amusing; to me it is depressing.'

'Exactly so. I am reminded to-day of what is said in Scripture of the world before the Flood. They were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the flood came and swept them all away.'

'You are not far wrong. The flood is surely rising which will sweep them all away. According to popular tradition, the inlet where now the blue waters roll up to Kingsbridge was once a fertile valley, with towns and churches and mansions. The ocean broke in one stormy night and swept them clean away—no, I am wrong—buried them deep, deep in mud. Where was once waving corn is now mud—nothing but mud, and mud that stinks. First the age of gold, then of silver, then of iron, then of clay mingled with iron, and now we are on the threshold of the age of vulgar mud. Sea-wrack for corn, barnacles for men, winkle-shells for palaces!'

'I see you also have a hankering after what is death-doomed!'

'I regret the decay of what is noble and generous; but it is inevitable. Out of the clay God made men, and out of the coming mud He will mould a new order. When the flat-fish are in the deep sea they have their deep-sea flavour. When they come into our creek their flesh assimilates itself to the flavour of our slime. We shall have to accommodate ourselves to be vulgar, commonplace, to think mud, to taste mud, to have muddy aspirations.'

'I see,' said Crudge impatiently, 'you belong to the upper crust more fully than by the feet. I don't, and I don't want to! However, the upper crust will have to go under shortly and get sodden in the gravy.'

'Yes,' said Beavis, sadly, 'it will go down. Everyone outside can tell the time better than the man in the clock-case. I am in the office of the Duke's lawyer, and am son of his steward: I have plenty of opportunity of noting the tendency of affairs. What, I ask myself, will become of these people, accustomed to the state of a ducal mansion, to the respect and consideration that surrounds them, when cast out, encumbered with a title and a history, reared in one world, hurled into another? To me the scene to-day was one of infinite pathos.'

'The end is not so near as you suppose,' said Crudge.

'It cannot be very distant,' exclaimed Beavis. 'I would give

my best heart's blood to save them from ruin, for they are the worthiest people in the world. But I am not blind to their faults. Look there'—he pointed to a row of handsome almshouses in the 'cottage-Gothic' style, each with its pretty garden before it—'Here live superannuated servants of the family rent-free, on pensions. Yonder is the school, entirely supported by his Grace.'

'Almshouses are mischievous institutions; they superinduce a habit of improvidence.'

'That may be true. According to modern doctrine, charity impoverishes. To give to the poor is to harm them, and should be made penal. The survivals of the old world do not see this.'

'Why should the Duke maintain a school? He should throw the cost on the rates and have a Board.'

'So he should; but he thinks it his duty and privilege to provide the children of all who live on his land with education free of cost, and with religious instruction on the principles of the Established Church. He belongs to a past order of ideas, and that is his view. We who belong to the new order object to gratuitous and to denominational education. The Duke is a patriarch, full of patriarchal notions of obligation to and care for all who belong to him. He would provide for everyone born on his estates if he were able, like the Incas of old Peru.'

'That interferes with individualism,' said Crudge.

'Of course it does; but he belongs to the old school of moral responsibilities. The General, Lord Ronald, belongs to the old school in military ideas; and the Archdeacon, Lord Edward, belongs to the old school in theology. The Marquess has an honourable soul, but he belongs to the old school of *Laissez faire*. Lady Grace belongs to the old school of sweet womanly culture. Not one of them has any idea how near the edge of the precipice they stand. They look on political dangers as the rocks in their course, and not on financial breakers among which they are running and in which they will go to pieces. It is true that they know they have not the wealth which once belonged to the family; but they sigh over the past without bestirring themselves for the present. What is to be done for these blind people? To rob them of their illusion is impossible. It circulates in their blood. To save them in spite of themselves—how is that to be done?'

The solicitor listened attentively. He said, with a smile, 'Before the Flood they married, and that did not arrest the

tide. Before this flood it may do wonders. The Marquess may make a marriage which will save the property.'

'He may do so,' answered Beavis, 'but then he must go about the country heiress-hunting, and this he will not do. He is too proud. Heiresses will not come in troops to be marched past him, as were maidens in the days of Ahasuerus the king. The Marquess postpones marriage to the Greek Kalends. He reads, smokes, hunts, fishes, yachts, shoots, plants rare pines, believes in his family, and is glued to Court Royal.'

'But has not your father done something to rouse them to a sense of their danger?'

'My father sees with their eyes, hears with their ears, thinks with their brains. To him, the ruin of the Kingsbridge family is impossible; Providence cannot allow it, and reign above the spheres as a moral power.' He turned sharply round to Mr. Crudge, and said, in a voice that trembled with emotion, 'Why are you here? No doubt you have not come here for change of scene, and air, and society?'

'Oh dear, no,' answered Mr. Crudge; 'I cannot afford that. I am here on business—Kingsbridge business. Here we are at my inn. Good-night.'

'May I come in? I will detain you from your bed only a few minutes longer; but I cannot return till I am satisfied.'

'Satisfied!' echoed Mr. Crudge. 'What satisfaction can I give you? However, come in, and take a glass of something.'

'You must excuse me that,' said Beavis, entering the coffee-room with the solicitor. 'You understand my position, my relation to the family. I hope I am committing no indiscretion when I ask you for light on your object in coming here. You say that the end is not so near at hand as I anticipate. You speak, then, with some authority. You know the circumstances. I am warmly attached to the whole family. I have been reared in the tradition and reverence for it. My father and grandfather have been stewards for more years than I can tell. If the Kingsbridge family goes to pieces, some of the blame will attach to my father. Is it not possible that something can be done to save them? I have no right to appeal to your sympathy, but I cannot bring myself to believe that you desire the ruin of one of the grandest names among the English aristocracy.'

'I really care little or nothing about them; the name of Eveleigh has no more merit with me than that of Smith,'

answered Mr. Crudge. 'But you must not expect of me to confide to you matters concerning my clients, and to assist you with advice which may thwart their interests, which I am here to advance.'

'Of course not. I merely ask your purpose in coming here,' said Beavis.

'That is no secret,' answered the solicitor. 'Among other debts weighing on the property is a mortgage on the Kingsbridge estate, held by the Stephens Brothers, which has been called in. The Duke finds a difficulty in raising the money, and he further wishes to raise a trifle of a few thousand. I have a client who will advance the entire sum. There is nothing extraordinary in this, nor is the Duke threatened in any way.'

Beavis considered.

'What is the name of your client?'

'Emmanuel. The transfer of the mortgage will not affect the Duke in the least. The debt remains, and the interest will be paid to Mr. Emmanuel instead of to Messrs. Stephens.'

'I do not like this,' said Beavis. 'An Emmanuel, I suppose the same man, has the mortgage on the home estate, with park and mansions. Does this fellow, Emmanuel, know the condition we are in?'

'I know his thoughts as little as yourself,' answered Crudge, who wished to bring this conversation to an end.

'This is the third time the name of Emmanuel has turned up in the affairs of the Duke.'

'It is possible.'

'I see,' said Beavis; 'you will say no more. Well, good-night. At what time will you be at my father's office to-morrow?'

'At half-past ten or eleven.'

'Say eleven. Allow me time to have an interview first with the Marquess. Good-night.'

When Beavis was gone, Crudge shrugged his shoulders. 'No good in that fellow. Bitten with the aristocratic craze. Wouldn't I only like to have my claws as firm as himself in the wool! Bob, bob, bob—till I fed on the fat of the dying wether.'

On Beavis's return, he saw that there was a light in the study. His father had not gone to bed. Beavis was glad of it, as he felt in no mood for sleep, so he knocked at the door and went in.

Mr. Worthivale was sitting over the fire, with a slipper-

less foot against each jamb of the mantelpiece, smoking and looking dreamily into the coals.

'Well, Beavis, seen your friend tucked in between the sheets?'

'No friend of mine,' answered the son. 'I never saw him before you introduced him to Court Royal.'

'Look here,' said Mr. Worthivale, pointing with the mouthpiece of his pipe at a book that lay open on the table, page downwards, to mark the place. 'I've been reading Ouida's last. What do you think of the story, Beavis? I rather like it.'

'Never read anything of Ouida's in my life,' answered the young man. 'Don't care if I never do. Now I want a word with you on business, father, if you can spare me ten minutes.'

'Business!' sighed the steward. 'Eternally business. After I had done my work for the day, as I hoped, in dropped that solicitor, Crudge, to badger me; and now that I thought to drowse over my pipe and Ouida, in you come, blowing a blast of business cold in my face to rouse me. No, I'll talk no business to-night. Pour yourself out a glass of cold whisky and water, and smoke a cigar, and then to bed. You will have to find a tumbler for yourself. There are plenty in the pantry, with thumb-marks imprinted on their rims. I told Emily to put out two whilst you are here, but the girl's head is like a sieve. She is courting, I presume. The sugar-bowl is empty; the housekeeper has forgotten to fill that. When I say empty, I am wrong; there is a cake of brown moist sugar at the bottom, solid as pie-crust. The lumps of white had been tumbled in on top—to save trouble, I suppose.'

'I really must have a word on business with you to-night, father. The solicitor from Exeter will be here to-morrow morning.'

'Well, what of that?'

'He will come about the mortgage; and what I want to say concerns the family we alike love, and would save from ruin.'

'Ruin! Fiddlestick's ends!'

'My dear father, the situation is desperate.'

'My dear Beavis,' answered Mr. Worthivale testily, 'I am steward, and I ought to know the state of affairs better than anyone else, and I refuse to have it spoken of as desperate.'

'You may refuse, father, to allow their affairs to be called desperate, but desperate they are.'

'You forget yourself, Beavis. You take too much upon you. A raw hand lays on the paint too thick.'

'Their affairs have got into such a condition that nothing save a miracle can stave off ruin; and the age of miracles is past.'

'Now, Beavis, you impeach my administration of their property. If they come to ruin, I shall be blamed.'

'Of course you will, father,' said the young man. 'I do not for a moment dispute your devotion to the Duke, your readiness to do all you can to promote his interests; you have looked at the sun so long, father, that you are dazzled, and cannot see the specks—specks!—the total eclipse that is stealing on.'

Mr. Worthivale was both surprised and offended at his son's plain speaking. He who is dissatisfied with himself is readiest offended. He smoked without speaking, then took a sip at his cold whisky and water.

'Who asked you to interfere? What right have you to meddle?' he asked grumblingly.

'No one has asked me to interfere; but my love for the family, and the long chain of obligations which binds me to it, forces me to break silence, and bark when burglars menace the house.'

'Menace! What cock-and-bull story have you got hold of now?'

'For heaven's sake, father, be serious. I am down here for a short while, and I cannot in conscience allow matters to proceed without raising my voice to arrest them.'

'Go on!' said his father ill-humouredly. 'Lord bless me. It seems to me that you were in petticoats only a few days ago, and I whipped you over my knee with the back of the hair-brush, and now you are grown so old that you stand up in judgment against your father, and put me on the rack.'

'I entreat you to listen to me,' said the young man. 'No one will free you from blame when the crash comes.'

'What crash?' asked his father doggedly.

'Open your eyes, your ears. I am not steward, but for all that, I can perceive the ripple and the run of the water before Niagara. Consider, what are the estates valued at?'

'That is more than I can say now. With these bad years

the land has depreciated one-half. In some places there is no sale at all for it.'

'Guess.'

'Let me see—no, hang it, I can't tell. We only value for succession duty, and, thank God, the Duke is still alive.'

'What are the annual receipts?'

'There I can meet you. In good years forty thousand; now about thirty, perhaps not as much—but this is temporary, temporary depression, only. The seasons have been against us, and American competition. Farmers, again, will not now put up with the outbuildings and the dwelling-houses that contented their fathers. Everything must be new. I assure you we have been forced, literally forced, to spend some thirteen or fourteen thousand on the property of late.'

'What are the debts?'

'You know that the old Duke was an extravagant man. He spent a great deal on the turf—more on the green baize. When the present Duke came of age, he consented to a mortgage on the Loddiswell estate and on the Awton property, to relieve his father from pressing difficulties, to the tune of four hundred thousand pounds. I know we have to pay sixteen thousand per annum on it, which is an awful pull. Then there was the house, which was begun by Duke Frederick Augustus. 'Pon my word, what with building, and new furniture, and ornamental laying out of the grounds, I believe seventy thousand would be under the mark. Then, when the Duke's three sisters were married, they were given fifteen thousand each, which was little enough. That had to be raised by a mortgage on the Kingsbridge manor. The Marquess got among a wild set when he was in the army, and was thrown on the Jews. I wish we could clear off his embarrassments. The sum is not, in itself, much; say ten thousand, but the interest is extortionate.'

'Stay,' said Beavis; 'the items you have mentioned come to nigh on five hundred thousand.'

'Yes,' said his father, 'you won't be under the mark when you say six hundred thousand. There is the mortgage on Court Royal to Mr. Emmanuel, and there are other matters. You understate at six hundred thousand.'

'Why, that makes an outleak of twenty-four thousand per annum on a nominal income of forty thousand.'

'I dare say. Then the charities of the Duke—subscriptions, pensions, and the like—come to something under twelve

hundred. And Lady Grace has her pin-money, and the Marquess his allowance, and both the General and the Archdeacon have something—no, I wrong Lord Edward, he has abandoned his claim.'

'What is the expenditure on the house and grounds, the household expenses, wages, and the like?'

'I cannot tell you, offhand, the items are so many.'

'Now, father, if, as you say, thirty thousand be nearer the present income of the Duke than forty thousand, and twenty-four thousand goes out in mortgages, that leaves but six thousand for everything.'

'These are exceptionally bad times; forty thousand is the true income.'

'The rate at which they are living is beyond even sixteen thousand. You have deducted nothing for all the outs that bleed a property in land. For five or six years the income has not been forty thousand, but there has been no reduction in the style of expenditure. Whence comes the money? Not a burden has been shaken off, fresh are annually heaped on. Let but one of the larger mortgages be called up, and the crisis has arrived.'

His father put his hands to his head. 'You exaggerate. Things are not as bad as you represent them.'

'They are as bad as they well can be. Is there a single estate that is not mortgaged? There must be a sale of some of the property. On the death of the Duke it will not be possible.'

'Sell!' exclaimed the steward, 'sell the estates! Impossible. Neither the Duke nor the Marquess will consent. One would not dare to make the suggestion to his Grace, it would kill him.'

'If not done voluntarily, it will be done compulsorily.'

'The Marquess will marry an heiress, and clear the property with her money. That is simple enough. How can you be so pig-headed, Beavis? Do you not see that all we want is time. With time everything will come right.'

Beavis sighed.

'What have you to say to this?' asked his father triumphantly. 'Have I the last trump?'

'I have nothing, nothing more to say,' answered the young man; 'I will trouble you no further, father.'

CHAPTER VIII.

THE MARQUESS.

NEXT morning Beavis Worthivale walked to Court Royal. He had access to the house at all times. His sister was there permanently, and he had been about it since he was a boy.

The house was large, forming a quadrangle, with the state rooms on the garden side. The Duke had his own suite of apartments ; so had the Marquess, so also Lady Grace, and so also Lord Ronald. Indeed, the Archdeacon had his own rooms there kept for him, to which he could come when he liked, and be at home. He was a married man without a family, and he found life dull at his Somersetshire parsonage, with only three hundred people to instruct in honour and obedience to the powers that be. He had an admirable, managing wife, and a safe curate, very ladylike, absolutely transparent, whom he could trust to do nothing to surprise or shock anyone, so perfectly good and colourless was he. The Archdeacon's health suffered in Somersetshire, and he was nowhere so well as at Court Royal, where the sea air and the society and good entertainment agreed with him. Moreover, he was the man whom the whole family consulted in every difficulty, and he was thought and believed himself indispensable to his brothers.

The Marquess had his own valet and groom, and sitting-room, and bed-room, and smoking cabinet. He was a man of considerable taste, and he and his sister had amused themselves in fitting up his apartments in the most perfect modern style. The walls of the sitting-room were gilt, with peacocks' plumes, spread, painted on the gold The curtains were peacock blue, sprinkled with forget-me-nots.

The carpet was an unfigured olive drugget with blue, green, and gold-coloured mats and rugs cast about it. He had a fancy for old Chelsea figures, and for Plymouth ware, and his cabinets and chimney piece were crowded with specimens bought at a time when Chelsea was run up by the dealers, and fetched fancy prices. His sister kept his room gay with flowers. That was her special care, and she fulfilled her self-imposed task well. The Marquess always pretended to distinguish between her bouquets and those arranged by other hands during Lady Grace's absence. He told her so privately, that he might not

hurt poor Lucy Worthivale, on whom the obligation devolved when her friend was from home.

Lord Saltcombe's cabinet was not invaded or interfered with. There he kept his hunting-whips, his guns, his fishing-rods, and the walls were adorned with the heads and brushes of foxes, tiger skins, and antlers of red deer. In one corner was an easel, for he sometimes painted. Against the wall a cottage piano, which he sometimes played. Also a rack of budding-knives and grafting tools, for he sometimes gardened. In the window hung a cage with a canary, which he sometimes fed, sometimes starved, and sometimes overfed. One wall was occupied by his library, a mixed collection of books : Rabelais, S. Thomas à Kempis, Jean Paul, Spielhagen, Herbert Spencer, 'The Lyra Messianica' and Algernon Swinburne, Victor Hugo, Emile Souvestre, Zola, The Duke of Argyll, Thackeray, 'Explorations of Africa,' and 'Smith's Dictionary of the Bible,' with 'Cometh up as a Flower' and 'Is Life worth Living?' thrust in between the volumes, and a pamphlet on Poultry upon the top of it.

Beavis Worthivale had known the Marquess from childhood, but it cannot be said that he understood him. In fact, no one understood him, yet everyone liked him. He resembled an audience-chamber, accessible to all, containing a closet of which no one possessed the key. He spent his time in reading or in out-door pursuits, yet he had no favourite study and no darling occupation. He was accomplished, knew several languages, was a fair classic, fond of history, and liked books of travel. He read whatever came in his way, changing his style, and subject, and language for the sake of contrast. He skimmed the work he took in hand, but never studied it. Reading with him was a distraction, not a pursuit ; a narcotic which enabled him to forget life and its burdens.

The Marquess was already forty, was full of the vigour and beauty of manhood, but it was easy to see that life was to him without object ; that he exacted of it little, and cared little for it. Always amiable, cheerful, agreeable, with plenty of conversation and pleasant humour, he was attractive in society, but was unattracted by it. He could enter into an argument, but was indifferent to the side on which he argued. He argued to kill an hour, not to convince an opponent. His uncle, the Archdeacon, was sometimes alarmed about him, lest he should become a sceptic ; but he was deficient in the earnestness of purpose which would make him take a line. He accepted

traditional creeds, religious and political, and customs social and domestic, without consideration, with an undercurrent of doubt. He never hurt anyone's feelings, never transgressed a canon of good taste. His eyes were open to the errors and follies of men, and to the virtues of humanity, but the former roused in him no indignation, the latter no admiration. Although he was cheerful in society, this cheerfulness carried with it an appearance of artificiality, and when he was alone he lapsed into melancholy or indifference.

He now and then made an excursion to Brittany or Switzerland ; he had been even to Brazil and South Africa. He came back with embroidered kerchiefs and carved spoons, lion skins and stuffed humming-birds, and a good deal to say about what he had seen, but with no ambition to ascend peaks or explore wildernesses. In politics he took no interest. He rarely visited relatives and acquaintances, disliking the trouble. He professed, and no one doubted his sincerity, that he was happier at home than anywhere else ; and more content lounging out a purposeless existence than making an effort to observe and please among strangers and in strange places.

This had not always been the case. He had been in the army, though never on active service. The few years in which he was in the army formed the one epoch in his life in which he had been lost to the sight of his family. The young Marquess, who had been somewhat spoiled at home, with great personal beauty, fascinating manners, a kindly disposition, little knowledge of the world, and a ducal coronet hanging over his head, had suddenly been transferred from the quiet of Court Royal to the vortex of the whirlpool of life. The Duke, owing to his heart disease and advancing years, had been obliged gradually to withdraw from town, and to retire from an active part in the social and political spheres to which he belonged. Lady Grace was always with him ; she would not leave her father for long, consequently the world of Court Royal had become a very quiet and a very small world. The temptations to which a young man like the Marquess would be exposed on entering the army were hardly realised by his father and by the Archdeacon. His sister had not the vaguest suspicion of them. 'He is a Christian and a gentleman,' said the Duke, 'and a Christian and a gentleman, put him where you will, does nothing unbecoming.'

At Court Royal none knew how he fared, whether he fought or whether he fell. His father heard, indeed, that he

was greatly admired by the ladies and liked by his brother-officers, and accepted this as his due. Then the Duke found that his son was unable to live on the annual sum allowed him. He heard that the Marquess was in debt, and he wrote him a stately reprimand, but he said to Lord Ronald, 'It is natural. He must live up to his name and title. It is unfortunate that the property is so burdened and shrunk.'

After that, rumours got abroad that Lord Saltcombe had been entangled in an intrigue which was not creditable—with an actress according to one version, with a married woman according to another. Nothing very definite was known, and it was sedulously kept from the ears of the Duke, Lord Edward, and Lady Grace.

Lord Ronald alone knew the particulars, but he was reserved. He never mentioned the matter to anyone.

Presently the news came that the Marquess was ill at Palermo. 'I did not know that he had gone abroad,' said the Duke. 'Ah! I see there have been signs of activity in Etna, no doubt he went to witness an eruption.'

A few months after, Saltcombe returned home, with the General, who had gone out to him.

Lord Saltcombe was greatly altered, apparently a broken man.

He had been brought to the edge of the grave by typhoid fever, 'owing,' explained the Duke, 'to the absence of sanitary arrangements, which are indeed deficient in the best Continental hotels. I sent out our own medical attendant, otherwise Saltcombe would have been bled to death by those Italian Sangrados.'

Gradually the Marquess recovered from his illness, but though his physical health was restored, his elasticity of spirit, his energy of character, were gone. He remained a prey to apathy, and, as he made no effort to shake this off, habit made it permanent. No one inquired into the truth of the rumours that had circulated, the best-disposed persons rejected them as slanderous gossip.

The Marquess left the army, remained at Court Royal, and settled into the uniform existence of a country gentleman.

When Mr. Worthivale told his son that the marriage of the Marquess was to solve the family difficulties, he expressed his hope and conviction of the entire Kingsbridge family. The Duke was desirous of seeing his son settled before he died, and both the General and the Archdeacon urged him to bestir him-

self, and find a wife. Lady Grace also, in her sweet, fondling manner, approached the subject and endeavoured to arouse him to the duty of marrying. Lord Saltcombe listened with a smile, turned aside the advice of his uncles with a jest, the entreaty of his sister with a compliment and a kiss, and his father's injunction with a promise to lay it to heart. There it ended. He took no step to find a wife, and though Lady Grace invited friends to Court Royal with the hope that one of them might arrest the attention of her brother, the heart of Lord Saltcombe remained invulnerable.

He saw through his sister's schemes and laughed at them. He was warmly attached to her, indeed she was his closest companion. She loved him with equal sincerity and with even greater tenderness. When his foot paced the terrace garden she heard it, came down, linked her hand in his arm, and walked up and down with him as he smoked.

They had plenty to say to each other, but he never allowed her to sound the depths of his soul. The conversation between them concerned the outer life, the events and interests of every day. This association with his sister had a refining and a purifying effect on Lord Saltcombe. She was ignorant of what had occurred during his brief career in the army, and did not inquire. Whatever it was, it had troubled and stained his mind and conscience, and daily intercourse with his sister restored the purity to the mind and the sensitiveness of the conscience, but it did not give him energy and ambition.

Beavis Worthivale was very little younger than the Marquess; they had known each other from childhood, and had always been on familiar and friendly terms. Beavis, as a boy, had shared tutors with Lord Saltcombe, and had been his companion in play. Of late, the friendship had been interrupted; Beavis had been from home, and Saltcombe in the army. Since the illness of the Marquess, Beavis had been unable to recover his place in the intimacy of the young nobleman that he had occupied as a boy.

Mr. Worthivale, in his devotion to the Kingsbridge family, had readily given up his daughter to be the companion of Lady Grace, without considering whether it was to his, her, and his son's advantage. By surrendering Lucy he had deprived his widowed old age of its chief comfort, his house of its proper mistress, and his son of his best companion. Lucy, moreover, was reared in the lap of luxury, which she could not expect elsewhere; she was not likely to marry anyone of rank, and

she was withdrawn from the sphere where she might have found a husband suitable in birth and fortune. She would grow up at Court Royal to be an old maid, a hanger-on of the ducal house, unable to endure the roughs and chills of life outside its walls.

In social intercourse men and women act and react on one another unconsciously. Men's minds give to those of women the impulse they require, and women's minds afford a corrective and softening influence to those of men. By daily association women are stimulated to mental activity, and men's opinions are rounded and smoothed. From the clash of minds, male and female, the latter take body, the former acquire temper. Woman stimulates man's imagination, man awakes her reason.

Through the Straits of Gibraltar flow two currents—one, setting outward, is warm, and light, and sweet; the other, setting inward, is cold, and heavy, and salt. It is the presence of these opposed currents gliding past each other that saves the Mediterranean from stagnating into a Dead Sea. It is the constant movement of the male and female currents, one giving warmth, the other salt, which preserves civilisation in purity and health. Lucy had suffered by her separation from her brother and father. She had lost mental and moral independence, and Worthivale and his son had lost the comforts of home and the polish which the presence of a lady can alone impart. The steward was unconscious of the sacrifice he had made, but his son saw and regretted it.

As Beavis was walking along the corridor towards Lord Saltcombe's apartments, the General's door opened and Lord Ronald appeared in his dressing-gown, a fez on his grey hair, and a pipe in his hand.

'What, Beavis, you here this morning? No use going on to Saltcombe; he is not out of bed. Here, step into my room and have a chat till the lazy fellow is ready to receive you.'

CHAPTER IX.

LORD RONALD.

Lord Ronald Eveleigh, K.C.B., was a widower. He had lost both his wife and his children. His wife, a very sweet and beautiful woman, whom he had tenderly loved, had died of consumption, after having given him two children, a boy and

a girl. He, as a soldier, had tried to harden his little ones by exposure, convinced that all delicacy is due to 'molly-coddling.' The consequence was that just as he was congratulating himself that his theory was successful, his children died of congestion of the lungs. They had inherited their mother's delicacy, and injudicious treatment precipitated the inevitable end. Left a widower, and childless, the old General had accepted his brother's invitation, and had settled for the rest of his days at Court Royal, a spot dear to him as no other spot on earth, because associated with his childhood.

He had inherited all the Eveleigh pride of birth, and though he cared nothing for his comfort, and despised luxury, yet he believed the state maintained at Court Royal to be indispensable to the dignity of the family, and respected it accordingly. His own rooms were plainly furnished. Their arrangements were stiff and tasteless. Over the chimney hung his sabre; at the side, on a level with his eye, as he sat in his arm-chair, were three medallion portraits of his wife and his two children.

In manner he somewhat lacked the polish of his brothers and nephew, and in features he was more rugged. His mind was simple, and his heart tender. The ambition of his life ended when the earth fell on his boy's coffin, but not its pride: that would remain as long as the family lasted. When Lord Ronald came to settle at Court Royal, he had no idea of the financial conditions of the Duke. There had been hitches in the payment of his annuity, which was charged on the estates; eventually the money had come, though it came irregularly. He recollected the splendour of the house when he was a boy, under the splendid Duke Frederick Augustus, his father—the annual season in town at Kingsbridge House, Piccadilly, the balls, the round of dinners, the whirl of entertainments, the drawing-rooms, the concerts, the carriages, the stables, the army of domestics. Now the Duke never went to town. The doctors forbade his travelling by rail. Lord Ronald chafed at this banishment to the country, not because he liked a season in town, but because he thought the presence of the family in London during the season comported with its dignity and duty to society. The retirement of the Duke had synchronised with the entry of the Marquess into the army. A residence in town was requisite only for Lady Grace, and Lady Grace least of all desired it. At Court Royal the customary state was kept up, but then, a palace on the south coast of Devon, ten miles from

a railway, is not the place where many people can be found to be impressed by that state.

After a while his eyes opened to the real condition of affairs, and he was fain to admit to himself that it was a happy thing for the family it had an excuse for not spending the season in town. The General tried to shut his eyes to the truth, tried to disbelieve what he could hardly credit. Without being remarkably sharp-sighted, Lord Ronald had a sound judgment. The future began to alarm him. He was much attached to his nephew, but he was angry with him.

'Why the deuce does he not marry an heiress?' he muttered to himself, as he sat smoking, oppressed with low spirits. 'It is high time that the wretched affair which came to an end at Palermo should be forgotten, and the consequences effaced. The creature was not worth fretting over. It was a bad job, but it is done with, and the volume containing that romance should be shut and put away. Is the title to become extinct, the family to die out, because of that piece of damaged goods? What is Saltcombe waiting for? There is nothing to expect. Why is he not man enough to shake himself free of the recollection as he shook himself free of the entanglement? The hope of the family hangs on him. Upon my soul, Saltcombe is enough to drive one mad.'

Heated by his reflections, Lord Ronald had attacked his nephew on the subject more than once, and had been repelled with such coldness that he had retired each time without effecting anything, and thoroughly disconcerted. He lost patience, but did not know what to do. He spoke to the Duke, and his Grace once or twice addressed his son on the advisability of his marrying. But that led to no alteration in his conduct.

Lord Ronald suspected more than he knew. As there was a constantly recurring difficulty about the payment of his annuity, he allowed it to fall into arrears, content if he had enough to defray his ordinary trifling expenses. The Marquess, who was supposed to see to business for his father, apologised to him for the delay, but the General always passed the matter over with a joke about his having no wants in a house where his wishes were forestalled. As his annuity was in arrear he forbore making inquiries, lest he should seem wanting in delicacy. He was told by the steward that the years were bad, the value of land was depreciated, rents were reduced 20 per cent., the farmers could not pay, farms were thrown on

hand. He was, moreover, not a man of business, had no idea of balancing accounts, and never could distinguish between creditor and debtor in a ledger. The uneasiness of the steward, his running to and fro to consult with the Marquess, the periodical invocations of the Archdeacon to advise, the troubled face of Lord Saltcombe at times, the difficulty in meeting pressing payments, the appearance, finally, of that hard, practical-looking lawyer at dinner on the Duke's birthday, like Banquo's spectre at the table, had made him very uneasy.

'What the devil keeps Saltcombe from marrying, and relieving the situation? It is his duty. Sometimes we go at the enemy in direct charge, at others sweep round and take them in rear. We can't dislodge those who hold the mortgages with the bayonet. Saltcombe must execute a flank movement, with an heiress. Years slip away, the cloud grows denser, debts become heavier, creditors more pressing. Saltcombe is forty, the age is passing at which he can pick and choose. He will soon have to take whom he can get.'

The General was thinking this, when he heard the steps of Beavis, and opened the door.

'Come in, my boy, come in,' he said. 'Saltcombe will not be ready to see you for another hour. What do you want with him?'

Beavis hesitated. He did not know what to say. His heart was full, he could think of nothing but what troubled him. He considered a moment, and then resolved to be plain with the General. It could do no harm, it might do good.

'I want to see Lord Saltcombe on business.'

'What?—connected with that lawyer fellow here last night?'

'Yes, Lord Ronald. I have no message from him, but I have asked him to postpone meeting my father and the Marquess till I have had an interview with the latter.'

'What is the matter? Is there a secret?'

'No secret—at least, none to be kept from you, my Lord. It concerns the family affairs.'

'Family affairs!' groaned the General; 'then I want to hear nothing about them. I am an old soldier, and not a steward, or a lawyer, or an accountant.'

'For all that,' said the young man, 'I wish greatly to talk the matter over with you. It seems to me that you, Lord Ronald, may do here that which no one else can effect.'

'What is that? I can do nothing. I am the last in the house.'

'You can do much if you will make the attempt, my Lord. Excuse me if I am presumptuous, but I am in earnest.'

'I am sure you are. You are a good boy. Go on. Speak out.'

'It is a very unpleasant thing to speak words that cut the ear they enter; however, in this case it is a duty. I suppose you know that, what with bad years, and the heavy burdens on the property that have been accumulating, and with the inaction of the Marquess, the state of affairs is about as bad as it can be. My dear father will not realise it. His Grace knows, and, I suppose, must know nothing of it. The Marquess is aware, but does not take the initiative, and you, Lord Ronald——'

'I shut my eyes,' interrupted the General. 'No, that is not altogether the case. I see, and am bewildered. I cannot move in the matter. I am awkwardly situated. In fact, the Duke is behindhand with me—not that I want the money, I have my half-pay, but the fact ties my hands, I cannot interfere. I have touched on the subject indeed to the Duke, but he supposes I refer to the losses sustained by the family in my grandfather's time. He was a sad rake. I do not like speaking about it to Saltcombe for certain reasons of my own. He is reserved with me; he never invites my confidence. So we go on in faith. Times will mend. Something will turn up. Legacies will rain gold. We don't eat our soup as scalding as it is served.'

'Expenses ought to be cut down in every way at once.'

'It has been done. The Duke no longer goes to town for the season. How any further economy is to be practised here I do not see. The house must be kept up, the gardens and grounds maintained in order,—the stables—where would you begin? A Duke cannot live like a curate, in furnished lodgings, on chops alternating with cutlets and steaks, and a maid-of-all-work to cook and dust, and make the beds.'

'Would it not be advisable,' asked Beavis in a low tone, with his eyes on the carpet—'would it not be well to make an effort, and put up with inconveniences, rather than allow the avalanche to rush down on your heads?'

Lord Ronald took Beavis by the arm, and paced the room with him, before he replied. The old General's face was pale, and his lips quivered.

'My dear boy, you imagine matters worse than they really are. You have allowed your mind to prey on your fears, and they have assumed the appearance and weight of a nightmare. It is impossible for such a catastrophe to overtake us. Think what we are, what our family is, and has been! Think what magnificent estates we have owned—and, indeed, we are not denuded yet.'

Beavis looked up, and saw that the old man was trying to silence his own convictions. Beavis was pained to have made him suffer, but it was necessary for every individual member of the family to be roused to face the danger.

'Dear Lord Ronald, I am not frightened by fancied dangers. The danger is knocking at the door. Would to God it were not so, but I cannot deceive myself. It is. I see you all here lulled in unconsciousness, losing time, letting slip opportunities of recovery which may never return, and delaying retrenchment, whilst retrenchment is availing.'

The General sighed. 'There is a God over all,' he said; 'we must trust to Providence.'

'And do nothing?' asked Beavis.

'What is to be done? I dare not speak to the Duke. Saltcombe would not listen to me, or, if he did listen, would shrug his shoulders and go his way.' After a pause, during which he smoked hard, he asked, 'What was that lawyer lugged in here for yesterday? What has he come to Court Royal about?'

'He has come concerning a transfer of the mortgage held by the Messrs. Stephens to a certain Emmanuel, who has already his hand on the home estate, with park and house, and has negotiated a loan or two besides.'

'What of that?'

'And there is to be another loan of five thousand.'

'That is not much. A trifle.'

'A trifle! but there have been so many of these trifles accumulated, and now they are an intolerable burden. A pound of feathers weighs as much as a pound of lead. Lord Saltcombe should be roused to look into the debts of the family, and form some decision as to what is to be done.'

'You want me to stir him up? I do not relish the task, and I doubt my ability to wake him.'

'He must be shaken out of his apathy.'

'I do not believe it is possible.'

'Then everything remains *in statu quo*—captain, pilot,

crew, all must have their sleep out whilst the vessel fills. It is cruel to wake them. They need repose. It is impossible to rouse some, they sleep so sound. All at once the ship gives a lurch, and the waves engulf her, as all wake up and rub their eyes, and ask where they are?'

The General's pipe was out. He turned his face to the window to hide the emotion painted on it. Beavis had spoken strongly—possibly too strongly; the words had poured scalding from his heart. He was a young man. He was not called in by the family to consult on its affairs. He had assumed the office unsolicited. Perhaps he was troubling the old man in vain.

The silence remained unbroken for some while.

Lord Ronald struck a match, but could not relight his pipe; his hand shook, so did the pipe between his lips. He threw the match away, and laid his pipe on the chimney-piece. Then he held out his hand to Beavis, without looking him in the face, and said, 'God bless you, dear boy! You are acting as your honourable and kind heart prompts. At a time when everyone thinks of self, it is pleasant to meet with one who cares for the fortunes of others.' He sighed. 'You are all of you good, true, all of you,—your worthy father, your dear sister, whom we love as our own child, and yourself. You have spoken to me sharply, and I know what it has cost you to do so—you who have been reared in reverence for the family. You have acted as a man of principle should act, but then, what is the good? The transfer will be executed, the fresh loan contracted, in another hour. It is too late to prevent that.'

'Yes,' answered Beavis, 'it is too late to prevent that, but it is not too late to say, "This shall be the last. We have let matters slide their downward way, now we will put on the drag. And the first step towards stopping will be to find out where we stand."'

'You are quite right, but I am no accountant. Your father has the books. Saltcombe is supposed to audit them.'

'Lord Saltcombe must not only look over the accounts, but take an interest in them.'

'Beavis,' said the old General, 'my debt against the estate shall be cancelled; but that is nothing, as it would not be exacted. Let it go. What is this five thousand for?'

'Current household expenses, I presume; but I do not know for certain.'

'Let me find the money. Decline this five thousand. It will be a relief to my mind that I have stopped one additional loan. I have my half-pay, and am able to put aside some money. I have more than I want. If I drop this into the gulf it is only a drop. I know I am robbing my heirs without benefiting the house; but then—the house is my heir. I should leave everything to my dear niece, except a little remembrance to Lucy and yourself. When that hard-faced lawyer comes, tell him the five thousand is not wanted. Damn it, Beavis, I have a mind to throw all my savings into the same hole, but then——'

'No, my Lord, you must not do this. It will only prolong the agony, and rob Lady Grace, as you say, of what in the end she may need. We must get a clear view of the situation before anything further is done.'

A tap sounded at the door, and Lord Saltcombe entered.

'You here, Beavis! Good morning, Uncle Ronald. I heard that Worthivale had been rampaging after me, and suspected you had trapped him. I overslept myself. I sat up very late last night.'

'Doing nothing, I suppose,' said the General, dryly.

'Exactly—doing nothing,' answered the Marquess, slightly colouring.

'We have been discussing family affairs,' said Lord Ronald; 'family embarrassments, I had better say.'

'Then I am in the way. I will withdraw.'

'Stay, Saltcombe, we want you to look into matters.'

'My dear uncle, I am at Mr. Worthivale's service every morning, whenever he calls me, to sign leases, audit accounts, and consent to the reduction of rent. I limit him to an hour; I cannot allow more time than that. The office exercises a soporific influence on my brain.'

'You really must be serious. Matters are desperate. Do you know that a lawyer is coming here to-day about a transfer?'

'Well! a transfer is not a nitro-glycerine bomb. I am impatient to make it. I am going to take Grace and Lucy out in the yacht. We must catch the tide. The Sheepwashes are going to meet us at Portsmouth. We are bound for Eddystone.'

'Saltcombe, you do not know how in earnest I am,' said the General; 'I entreat you to stay. I have much to talk to you about, and Beavis here has more.'

Young Worthivale was vexed. The old man wanted tact, and he was doing mischief.

'Beavis is coming with us,' said Lord Saltcombe. 'He wants a whiff of sea-breeze to take the office-dust out of his lungs, and blow the cobwebs from his brain.'

Beavis seized the opportunity to turn the conversation. He saw that the General irritated his nephew, without advancing the cause he had at heart. But the old man could not understand his tactics.

'What a man you are, Worthivale!' he said. Two minutes ago you were crying, "House on fire!" and now you are agog to be junketing with the girls. I will not be put off like this. You have stirred me up. I will have it out with Saltcombe.'

'My time, then, is yours,' said the Marquess, stiffly.

'Very well,' said the General, hotly. 'You must marry.'

'Whom?'

Lord Ronald did not answer; the question was not an easy one to answer.

'You remind me of the magistrates of the old German towns, who had the bachelors before them on attaining their majority, and bade them marry within six weeks, or forfeit their rights of citizenship.'

'There was sense in that. You must marry, Saltcombe.'

'Uncle, I will contemplate the five Misses Sheepwash today with that view.'

'Do not be absurd. You must marry money.'

'Beavis,' said the Marquess, aside, 'you will be at the pier at half-past twelve.'

The General was angered by his nephew's coolness.

'Saltcombe,' he said, 'time enough has elapsed since that Palermo affair——'

'For you to have learned, Uncle Ronald, that I will endure no allusion to it,' said the Marquess, gravely, whilst his colour went.

The old man looked him full in the face, and Lord Saltcombe met his eye firmly. He said not another word, but turned with a sigh to the window. The Marquess beckoned to Beavis, and they left the room together.

CHAPTER X.

THE FIFTH OF NOVEMBER.

THE Fifth of November was a great day at the Barbican. *Was*, it no longer *is*. The reason why it is so no longer may be gathered from what follows.

The Barbican offered about the only open space in old Plymouth where a bonfire might blaze, and fireworks explode without certainty of setting the houses round in flames, or of frightening horses and impeding traffic. Moreover, about the Barbican swarm and multiply indefinitely the urchins who most love to celebrate the anniversary of the Gunpowder Plot. They are deterred by no dread of injuring good clothes, are restrained by no respectable parents. They burn Guy Fawkes out of no deep-seated enthusiasm for the Crown and the Bible, but out of pure love of a blaze.

Now, stillness reigns on that momentous anniversary at the Barbican ; no crackers spurt, no pyre burns, for the police are there in force on the evening to prevent a repetition of such an event as that which took place on the occasion we are about to record.

The broad quay, the proximity of the waters and the coal barges, the good open space before the houses, had impressed the youth for many generations that no place was fitter for the fiery celebration than the Barbican. There were bits of old timber to be had for the asking or for the taking. The owners of the tar and tow and tallow store always contributed a cask, and some black fluid highly combustible. The colliers that lay in Sutton Pool were ready to give baskets of coal.

The adult population of the neighbourhood was in sympathy with the exhibition, turned out to see it, and contributed howls, cheers, and groans.

The Barbicanites had no pronounced political or religious antipathies. It was one to them whose effigy was burnt, they hooted and howled with equal enthusiasm whether the object represented 'Old Boney,' Pius IX., or a Puseyite. All they bargained for was that some one should be burned—who mattered little.

On the last occasion when the Barbican was illuminated by

a bonfire, the guy represented a local celebrity. Before that evening closed in, who the guy was to be was known to every inhabitant of the Barbican, except the individual himself. Never had contributions flowed in more copiously, and been given with greater alacrity. Not a householder refused when solicited, except only Lazarus, who, when solicited, responded with an oath, a lunge, and a whirl of his stick.

Darkness fell. Joanna put up the shutters as usual, and locked and barred the doors. Lazarus looked with evil eye on the Fifth of November celebrations as a criminal waste of excellent fuel, and he made or pretended business for the evening which would take him to the other end of the town.

Lazarus had come to entrust the care of the house and the business of the shop very much to Joanna, whilst he carried on business of an analogous but more respectable kind elsewhere. He could place perfect confidence in Joanna. She took as keen a relish as himself in driving a bargain and in 'doing' a purchaser. He suspected her, indeed, of secreting for her own use some of the money she received, but this was solely because he suspected everybody; and in this case his suspicions were unjust, for Joanna was scrupulously conscientious in accounting to him for every farthing she spent and received. It was part of her duty to screw down the poor and bleed them of their last drop of blood; it was part of her duty to throw dust into the eyes of a buyer, and deceive him with lies and disguises; it was her duty to be true to her master. Joanna was conscientious.

During the day Joanna had observed the growth of a pile of combustible materials before the house, and had engaged in many passages of arms about it. She had remonstrated as to its size and position; and, finally, she had pillaged it. She had, by watching her opportunities, succeeded in carrying off from it a quarter of a ton of coals which she had stowed in the closet under the staircase, till detected, and then the urchins engaged on the erection of the pyre kept a guard against further pilfering.

When she found that she could no longer plunder the pile, she stormed against the pile-builders, she invoked the aid of a policeman to demolish it. It was in dangerous proximity to the Golden Balls. What if the wind set that way? When the policeman failed to give her redress, she appealed to the bystanders, the inhabitants of the houses on the quay, but they

were all participators in the pyre, had subscribed coin or contributed fuel for its erection.

After she had locked up the house, Joanna retired to a window of the first floor, whence she could follow the proceedings. The Barbican was alive with people, and heads were protruded from all the windows. The evening was fine, no rain fell, no fog hung over the water and wharf. Joanna was girl enough to enjoy a blaze ; though old beyond her years in her views of life and of men, she had not lost childlike pleasure in what is beautiful and what is exciting.

Presently Joanna heard the bray of a horn, and the hubbub of voices mingled with jeers, laughter, and whoops. A moment after a crowd of boys, young men, and girls poured down the narrow street that debouches on the quay, carrying in their midst, supported on their shoulders, seated on a chair above their heads, the Guy Fawkes. Torches were borne and waved about the figure, and on its reaching the open space a Bengal light blazed up.

Joanna saw at a glance whom the effigy was designed to represent, and why the celebration had evoked so much interest on this occasion.

The figure was that of Mr. Lazarus. There could be no mistaking it. His peculiarities of costume and attitude had been hit off with real genius. A mask had been made or obtained with a sausage nose, like his, and a smirk on the thick lips, like his. His old fur cap, with flaps to cover the ears, which he wore in the shop, was faithfully reproduced ; so also his long-tailed greatcoat ; his black tie, which would turn with the knot under the ear, without a vestige of linen collar. The effigy was represented holding a ham-bone, which it was gnawing.

The crowd flowed from the street, and spread over the Barbican open space. The figure was planted in front of the Golden Balls, and three groans were given for Lazarus the Jew.

Joanna withdrew from the window that the people might not have the satisfaction of seeing that they were observed. Her face flamed with indignation and desire of revenge. She ascended a chest of drawers in the store chamber nearest the face of the house, whence she could watch proceedings unobserved. After the groans for Lazarus, a silence fell on the mob, and expectant looks were cast at his door. They supposed that the Jew, frenzied with rage, would rush forth,

cudgel in hand, to belabour all whom he could reach Disappointed in this anticipation, they removed the guy to the bonfire, and planted the figure, in its chair, on the top. Torches were applied, and amid huzzas and capers, and a ring of urchins dancing round the pile, the bonfire burst into lurid blaze.

Joanna saw the faces of the crowd illuminated by the fire. She saw those who lounged out of their windows looking on, laughing and applauding. She gnashed her teeth with impotent rage, and clenched her hands. She sat crouched, frog-like, on the top of a chest of drawers, with her fists closed, and her chin resting on them.

'Ah!' she muttered, 'you come to Lazarus, all of you, when in need; you can't do without him, and yet this is the reward he gets for helping you in trouble. Never mind, he has you all in his grip. He will not scruple now to give a squeeze, and your blood will run between his fingers. You also! How dare you!' she exclaimed, and pointed to an attic window from which peered a woman's face. The flames lit up the room, and cast Joanna's shadow against the wall, distorting and exaggerating the length of her extended arm. Her finger indicated the woman leaning forth from the garret window, watching what went on below, and enjoying the scene. That woman was the mother of two children. She pawned the blankets every morning that had covered her and her sons by night, for three-halfpence, and redeemed the children's clothes for the day. At night she pawned their rags and released the blankets. Six per cent. is the legal rate of usury, but Lazarus obtained from this widow five hundred per cent. And this woman dared to applaud his being burnt in effigy? Whither is gratitude flown?

Suddenly a report, a roar, then a burst of cheers, followed by a crash, and dead silence!

The ham-bone had gone off! That ham-bone was a rocket disguised in coloured paper. The designer of this exquisite piece of humour had planned that the rocket, on exploding, should shoot out to sea and extinguish itself innocuously in the water; but in the haste and excitement of planting Lazarus on the pyre no thought had been given to the pointing of the head of the ham-bone. The only idea prominent in the minds of the urchins was to set the figure opposite the door of the Golden Balls. The rocket was from the Government coastguard stores, liberally contributed by the man invested with charge of them.

When the flame ignited the rocket it went off with a rush and roar in quite the opposite direction to the sea, crashed through a window, and disappeared in the tow, tallow, and tar warehouse.

One precious gift of nature is accorded freely to Englishmen of all ranks and ages—the aptitude of doing the right thing at the right moment; in a word, presence of mind. Those present, the whole crowd of men and boys—instantly realised the gravity of the situation, and did that which was best to be done—they took to their heels. The first to go was the store-keeper who had contributed the rocket, and he went home as fast as the rocket had gone into the tow and tallow shop, slipped into bed, and called his wife's attention to the clock to enable her to swear that he had been laid up at that time of the evening with a bronchial catarrh. He was followed by everyone who had lent a hand or given a halfpenny towards the celebration. Thus the explosion of the ham-bone cleared the quay in five minutes.

The bargemen looked on from their boats in complacent expectation of a bonfire bigger than that on which Lazarus was burning. Only a few men stood about the pyre, and endeavoured with rakes to thrust it over the edge of the wharf into the pool before the police appeared.

Joanna had not observed what had taken place. She had indeed seen the flash of the rocket and heard the cheers, but from her chest of drawers she could not see the tow and tallow store.

Why had the crowd dispersed so suddenly? Why was the bonfire being put out, and the half-consumed Lazarus in his flaming chair toppled into Sutton Pool?

Joanna was roused by the sound of her master's key in the side door. She remembered that she had bolted the door, so she descended to withdraw the bar and admit him. Then her pent-up wrath found vent, and she told him of the outrage.

'Well,' said Lazarus, without signs of discomposure, 'it won't cost me a penny. Have they singed one of my coats? burnt my cap? Not a bit! so it don't matter to me. Run out, Joanna, with your shovel, and see if you cannot rescue some of the coals which are being wasted, and then look sharp and get me my supper ready. Dear, dear! The figure was dressed like me, and all the beautiful clothes burning. Don't you think that we might fish him out of the water and see what can be done with the garments—they cannot be utterly

spoiled? So they are raking out the fire, are they? Scared by the police, I suppose. It is wicked, inconsiderate waste to toss coals and sticks into the pool. The supper can wait; the apple won't get cold, and it may ripen by delay.'

'What is that?' exclaimed the girl, as a flash of vivid yellow light smote in at the window. 'They've surely never gone and lighted the bonfire again.'

'They are burning what remains of the coal. Oh, the wicked waste!'

'No!' said Joanna, excitedly; 'the light strikes from the wrong side of the street.'

She ran to the door, threw it open, and uttered an exclamation of dismay.

The tow and tallow store was in flames; it had burst into blaze at once; all the windows on the second floor were vividly illuminated, and from one a spout of fire issued and ran up the walls. No one lived in the storehouse; but an old woman, very deaf, occupied an attic, and she was wont to retire early to bed.

A light wind was blowing, likely to carry the flames across the street upon the house of the Jew.

Lazarus stood in the doorway behind the girl. He shared her dismay, but gave louder and more violent expression to it. He swore and stamped.

'The fire will catch me! The fire will burn me and all my pretty, pretty things! Where are the police? Where are the fire-engines? What can I do to save myself?'

'Master,' said Joanna, recovering herself, 'the shutters are up below, so that the basement is safe. There is not much danger to be apprehended till the flames issue from the roof; then it is possible they may be carried our way, or that sparks will be dropped on our roof and make the slates so hot that they will snap and the rafters ignite.'

'Oh, Joanna! run, run with all your legs after the fire-engine!' cried the Jew, wringing his hands. 'If my house catches I am lost—ruined past recovery! I may as well die in it. I could not survive its destruction. I cannot bring my pretty things down; I have no place where to store them. If they are taken into the street they will be stolen. There are thousands of beautiful things here no money can replace. It would take an army of men to clear them all out in twenty-four hours; and the wicked flames allow no time. Run, Joanna, run for the engines! I'll give a sovereign if they will save my place.'

'Master,' said Joanna, 'lock the door and admit no one. The fire-engines will be here before long. Come with me to the roof; we must protect that. We must carry up carpets, and spread them over the slates.'

'Carpets!' exclaimed Lazarus. 'They will be burnt.'

'The carpets rather than the whole house.'

'Not number 247, that is a lovable old Persian, worth a lot of money, not much worn. Don't take that.'

'Not if we can do without. We will carry up the worst, and I will scramble on to the ridge, and spread the carpets over the roof. Then you must pass me water, and I will keep them moist. I'll take a mop, and when sparks fall I'll mop them out.'

'Oh, Joanna, you are a clever girl! Run! This is better than the engines; I sha'n't have to pay for salvage if they send a little squirt over me.'

Joanna made no answer, but fetched buckets. At the top of the house was an open lead rain-water tank.

'You must help me with the carpets,' said she, hastily. 'Come, this is not the time to stand bewildered and irresolute.'

The light shone fiercely, brilliantly illumining the room where they stood, like sunlight. Everything in it was distinctly visible.

'Not that Brussels!' cried the Jew; 'it is worth four shillings a yard, and there are a hundred in it, that makes twenty pounds. I cannot afford it; I will not throw away such a lot of money. Here, if it must be, take this old bedroom Kidderminster, it is full of holes. No, Joanna, keep your hands off the Axminster, it is good as new, and has a border round it.'

'Give me the Axminster. I must have it—it is thick and will keep sopped with water longest. Help me up with it.'

Joanna went out upon the roof dragging the heavy carpets after her by means of a rope which she had looped about them, assisted by Lazarus from below, who thrust the bundles up the ladder and through the trap-door. He assisted, but tempered his assistance with protests and groans. The girl scrambled, cat-like, up the low pitched roof, and flung the carpets across the ridge, or fastened two together, and spread one on each side upon the slates.

'Give me another,' she shouted. 'Time is precious; I must, I will, have both the Persian and the Brussels.'

'The Persian is not to be parted with under fifteen guineas,'

moaned Lazarus, and then half to himself, 'Guineas are an institution; say pounds when a purchaser asks the price, and when he comes to pay swear to guineas. Will you have this Kidder.?'

'It is too thin,' answered the girl. 'See! The fire is in the upper storey, and in ten minutes will be through the roof. When that gives way we shall be buried under a rain of fire. Hark!'

'You hear the engine coming,' said the Jew, 'and the squealing of the old woman in the garret. Joanna, take the Persian, take everything, but save my house.'

In a brief time Joanna had covered the roof on both sides with carpets and rugs of all sorts and values, and had soused them well with water. The Jew stood in the tank, up to his waist, and filled the pails. The girl drew them up to her by the rope attached to their handles. She was seated astride on the apex of the roof, and poured the contents of the pails over the carpets.

Whilst Joanna and her master were taking these precautions for the protection of the house of the Golden Balls great excitement prevailed below. The street and the quay were crowded; the fire-engine played on the roofs adjoining the burning house. At a window high up stood the deaf old housekeeper, wringing her hands and shrieking for help. The crowd roared, women sobbed. The ladder was fixed, and a fireman mounted to the rescue. The mob was silent, then cheered as the man put his arm round the poor creature, and endeavoured to bring her down. But she was too frightened by the aspect of the depth she had to descend to yield, and she struggled, and cried, and escaped back into the room filled with smoke and twinkling with fire, bewildered, and in her mazed mind unable to decide whether to risk a fall or to perish in flames. The struggle was of engrossing interest to those in the street; neither Joanna nor the Jew wasted a thought on it. They were concerned only with the precious house of the Golden Balls, and were supremely indifferent to the fate of a stupid old woman of seventy-three.

The firemen and the mob had eyes only for the tow and tallow shop, and the rescue of the housekeeper. When, at length, in spite of her resistance, she was carried down the fire-escape, and received unhurt at the bottom, then only did they observe the proceedings on the roof opposite.

A gush of vivid flame rushed up into the air, over the pawn-

broker's house. Joanna saw the peril, and slipped down the opposite incline of roof into the tank. Directly the danger was over, she rose, scrambled again to her perch, drawing a pail of water after her, which she emptied over some fire-flakes that had fallen on the roof. The spectators had held their breath, believing that the flame had swept her away and cast her down, broken and burnt. When she reappeared she was greeted by a cheer, of which she took no notice, not supposing it was given to her.

'There is a hole burnt in the Axminster,' she called to Lazarus.

The Jew, standing in the tank, streaming with water, held up his arm and answered, 'Oh, Joanna, don't say so! If that occurs again I'll whack you.'

'I cannot help it. I will mend the hole after, if I can.'

'Ah,' said Lazarus, dipping a bucket, 'mend it, mend it!'

In the meantime a consultation had taken place in the street. 'That girl must come off the roof,' said the Captain. 'We must throw our water over it. We can't send the jet till she removes; it would knock her down. Lord! she is like a monkey cutting about up there.'

Joanna had seen a spark resting on the roof beyond her reach, and had gone after it with a mop and extinguished it. The firemen knocked at the house-door, but met with no reply. They tried to force it open, but it was so firmly barred that it resisted their efforts.

'Let be!' shouted a gentleman in evening dress. 'Captain James, let me run up and dislodge her.'

'If you like, Mr. Cheek. It must be done at once.'

A ladder was applied to the Jew's house, and the gentleman mounted, armed with an axe, broke one of the windows, and swung himself into the house. Joanna and Lazarus, who had observed nothing that went on below, were amazed to see him emerge from the attic door upon the roof.

'Robbers! burglars!' screamed the Jew. 'I'll call the police and have you taken into custody. I'll shoot you! What is it that you want here?'

'Come down at once!' shouted the gentleman in evening dress to the girl. 'Come down from the roof immediately.'

'She is protecting my house from fire!' said the Jew. 'She shall 'bide where she is.'

'Come down!' called Mr. Cheek, disregarding Lazarus. 'The roof of the house opposite will give way in a minute, and

you will be overwhelmed with fire. The engine must play upon this roof.'

'I'll have no squirting here,' said the Jew. 'Joanna and I can manage beautifully.'

'She will be killed if she stays there,' said the gentleman.

'Not she; she'll slip into the tank and duck, as before.'

'The engine cannot play till she descends,' remonstrated Mr. Cheek.

'She sha'n't stir. You only want an excuse to make me pay. Mark my protest. Squirt as you will, you'll pump no money out of my pocket. Joanna and I can manage first-rate without you.'

Without wasting another word on the Jew, Mr. Cheek crept up the slope of the roof, and seated himself on the ridge, astride, opposite Joanna. The girl was wet through and through. Her dark hair was loose, flapping about her neck and shoulders, dank with moisture. The yellow glare of the burning house was on her face, the flames leaping in her dark eyes; she held the mop in one hand, and the empty pail dangled from the other. Opposite her was Mr. Cheek, in fine black cloth evening suit, patent leather boots, white tie, and diamond studs.

'Come down, you wild cat! The roof yonder will be in with a crash directly. Come down at once, and let the engines play over this house.'

'Who are you? Go your way, or I will knock you into the street with my mop.'

'Come down, you fool! do you not realise the danger? You will be burned in a wave of flame in another moment. Down at once, or I give the signal, and a jet of water will knock you over as sure as if you were shot.'

Joanna looked down into the street, and realised the position. 'I will come,' she said quietly; 'you are right.'

She threw her foot over the ridge, and slipped down. Mr. Cheek followed.

'Oh dear!' exclaimed the Jew. 'Young gent! you've done for your dress suit; but I've some second-hand articles below you shall have cheap.'

'Come out of the tank,' said Mr. Cheek. 'Come under cover at once, before the fire-shower falls. Come in, as you value your life.'

'Mr. Charles Cheek!' exclaimed Lazarus. 'Bless me! I did not recognise you at first. We've done business together

already, and, I hope, not for the last time. I beg your pardon, if I addressed you without proper respect.'

'Come in; come in at once. The hose is playing.'

He drew the Jew after him down the step, and fastened the door. Joanna had already descended. They heard the rush of the water above their heads on the slates.

'Upon my word,' said the young man, 'that was a clever idea of yours, covering the roof with wet carpet.'

'My Joanna suggested it,' answered the Jew. 'A girl that, with the head of a man on her shoulders—but eats like rust, and grows like a debt.'

'Well done, you girl!' said the young man. 'I must have a look at you.'

He turned, and saw Joanna, hanging behind, in shadow. He caught her by the shoulders, and drew her to the window, where the glare of the burning warehouse would fall over her face. She was self-composed, and thrust her wet hair back behind her ears, and then, full of confidence, raised her eyes and encountered his.

'Upon my word, a fine girl. Of course there are wits behind such great clever eyes. By Jove! there is devilry there as well.'

He dropped his hands, as with a crash the roof of the house opposite fell, and they seemed to be enwrapped in flame and light as of the sun. Then they heard the rattle of falling ashes on the slates above them, and the redoubled roar of the water extinguishing the fire that had lodged overhead.

None of them spoke for some minutes.

Presently Mr. Cheek said, 'I believe the girl's expedient has saved your house, Mr. Lazarus. I must have a look at her again by daylight. Now I am off. You did not know me as an amateur fireman, Lazarus, did you? I am hand-and-glove with Captain James. Often help. What is the name of the little devil? Joanna? Farewell for the present, Joanna, we shall see each other again. Au revoir!'

CHAPTER XI.

WHO WAS RACHEL?

On the morrow of the fire, Lazarus ascended to the roof and wailed over the spoilt carpets. Joanna consoled him as best she could; she pointed out to him the masses of charcoal that had fallen on them, and which, flaming or glowing, would infallibly have split the slates had they fallen on them. 'Then, even if the timbers did not burn, you would have had to call in the masons to mend the roof, and tradesmen, as you well know, are shameless. They would put their nails through the lead gutters to make work for the plumbers, and break additional slates to run up their own bills, and smash windows to force you to call in the glazier, and let the water in on the rafters to rot them, and necessitate the coming of the carpenter.'

'That is true, very true, Joanna; tradesmen are scoundrels. Nevertheless, I must lament over my loss; it is terrible, it goes to my soul, it corrodes it like canker. The Persian was a real beauty, and the tapestry Brussels was a joy to contemplate. Such colours, such posies of flowers, and no defect anywhere, except an oil-stain in one spot where a lamp had been spilt, and that might have been cleaned for a few shillings. We must have the carpets down as soon as they are dry, and go over them carefully. With a darning needle and some coloured wools, and little patches put in from old carpets, I dare say you may disguise the worst blemishes. Then, my dear, when you unroll them before purchasers take care to expose the uninjured end. There is a great deal, Joanna, in the rolling of fabrics. Always look well which end is most damaged, and begin rolling with that; then, when you show your goods you show to advantage.'

When they redescended to the storerooms, Mr. Lazarus said, 'Dear me! a window broken! That was done last night by Mr. Charles Cheek. He meant well, no doubt, but he has done us a damage that will cost many shillings to repair. Not only are the panes broken, but the woodwork is cut away. He is a gentleman, and when he returns, as he said he would, you had better point out the damage, and make out a case to him that I hold you responsible, and that you will have to repair it from your own pocket. If you manage matters well you may

get twice the value of the repairs from him, and I think I can patch up the window myself. I am skilful with my knife, and I have diamonds by the dozen wherewith to cut glass. Putty is easily made with white lead and boiled oil. I don't want any tradesmen in my repository. Light-fingered gents they.' He looked round his storerooms and rubbed his hands. 'What a mighty piece of good luck it was that the tow and tallow shop burnt instead of this emporium of beauty and utility! I am sure, Joanna,' he added, with unction in his tones, 'we ought to be truly thankful for mercies; and I hope, my child, you will take this to heart, and be thankful that the old housekeeper over the way was burnt instead of me and you.'

'She escaped,' said the girl. 'She was saved by the fire-escape.'

'That modifies the case,' observed the Jew. 'Still, though things did not go as far as they might have gone, we sha'n't do wrong to be thankful. At least, you can.' The Jew looked with complacence at his collections of glass, china, furniture, and clothing, and sighed. 'What a quantity of beautiful things we have here!' he exclaimed. 'I could sit by the hour looking at them, watching the play of light over the cupboards and washhandstands, and in and out among the old clothes. It is lovely. Don't talk to me about landscape! I've seen folks sit on the Hoe and look out over Plymouth Sound, and the Mount Edgcumbe woods, and Maker Point, and say it was all a lovely, ever-varying scene. I can make nothing of it; but I do see a feast of beauty in these storerooms. This is the sort of landscape to gratify the healthy eye. Dear! dear! dear! how could Rachel ever make up her mind to leave this?'

'Rachel!' exclaimed the girl. 'Who was she?'

Lazarus shook his head. 'This is a vale of tears,' he said, 'full of moths. There is one yonder, Joanna; kill it.'

'Who was Rachel?' asked Joanna.

'I wish you would go sharp after that moth,' said the Jew. 'Dear alive! the mischief these moths do is awful.'

'Who was Rachel?' asked Joanna again. 'I will catch no moths till you have satisfied me.'

'I will tell you by-and-by.' The Jew sighed. 'Ah! Joanna, I am not the ungrateful old master you may have supposed me. You have done me many a service, but none greater than that of last night. I know I am indebted to you, less the value of the carpets spoilt by the fire. Deduct them from the total and still something remains, not much, but a balance

—a small balance. It is pleasant to have a balance in one's favour, is it not, Joanna? I will show you my gratitude. We shall have a regular royal debauch for supper. I have some tinned tomatoes. Tomatoes are said to be nutritious, and clear the complexion. I had half a dozen tins and one over from a broken grocer in Courtney Street. We'll debauch on the odd tin. I am double your age, Joanna, and therefore require twice as much nutriment as you, so I shall eat two tomatoes to your one. You, however, may enjoy the gravy. Sop your bread in that, and close your eyes whilst it lies on your tongue. A tin of tomato is sold for one-and-threepence at the grocers and tenpence at the stores. Hang the expense; we will revel in good things for once; and we will wash down the tomatoes with water. That, Joanna, is the drink of the Quality. No more tawny old port, its day is done. Not nutty sherry any more. Not claret, nor Burgundy; not even champagne. They are all played out. Now the Quality are teetotal. Let us be of the Quality also, and teetotal too. Fashions change in drinks as in dress. Now it is cardinal red and marsala, then crushed strawberries and water. Prepare the table, Joanna.'

The girl obeyed without enthusiasm. She placed bread on the table in the kitchen, lighted the fire in the stove to heat some vegetables, and threw a ragged but clean cloth over the table. One candle and the fire in the stove illumined the wretched kitchen.

'I take a little whisky with my water,' said the Jew, pouring some spirits into his glass, 'but I do not approve of alcohol for the young. It stunts their growth, and sows the seeds of a craving for strong liquor which may in after-life bring them to D. T.'

'Who was Rachel?' asked Joanna.

'Upon my word, Joanna! What persistency you have! When you have set your head on doing a thing you do it, and when you have set your head on knowing a thing you give a body no peace till you know it.'

'You promised to tell me.'

'I must keep my promise; I am a conscientious man, and when I say a word I hold by it. That is the principle of business. Only at the last moment give your word a twist in your direction, if you can. When you have agreed to sell for three sovereigns don't make out the bill for four, but for three guineas.'

'Who was Rachel?'

'Snuff the candle, Joanna, with your fingers, and—there—don't throw the snuff on the floor lest you set it on fire; and don't wipe your fingers in your apron where the smut will show, but in your hair, where it will not be seen.'

'Who was Rachel?'

'I will tell you, child, but really you irritate me with your pertinacity. I will first light a pipe. I don't offer you one, as it is not decent for a woman to smoke. The habit might grow and interfere with your matrimonial prospects. Some women take cigarettes on the grounds that they suffer from asthma or bronchitis. You are sound in throat and lung, Joanna, sound as a bell. Never knew anything the matter with you except inordinate appetite. Let me have that chair, Joanna. It is the only one with a seat. You can accommodate yourself on the fender.'

An old flour-barrel stood in the corner. Joanna sprang on it and seated herself thereon. Then, fixing the Jew with her keen eyes, she asked again, 'Who was Rachel?'

'Really, Joanna,' said the pawnbroker, 'your ways are inhuman, and give one a cold shiver. You squat there on the cask like a goblin in an illustrated fairy-tale. You are not a bit like an ordinary girl. There is no buoyancy and freshness in you. Yet—I'll tell you what—I'll do something splendid to show you my gratitude, and wipe off my indebtedness. I'll learn you to dance.'

'What!' exclaimed the girl, starting.

'I have a bad debt with a dancing master,' said the Jew; 'and the only way in which I can recover my money is to take it out in lessons. You want refinement and deportment, and I will do what is magnanimous, and have you instructed by Mr. Deuxtemps in what becomes a lady. You shall learn to polk and jig and curtsey like a blue-blooded born marchioness.'

'That's grand,' said Joanna.

'I thought I should please you,' said the Jew; 'I'm not a master to be served without reward. Now I will do something more for you. I will show you the jewels I have, and perhaps let you put some on. I have diamonds, carbuncles, and sapphires fit to make a cat scream. Put out the fire, give me the candle, and follow me to my room.'

He led the way into his private chamber, where was his bed, and where he kept his most precious articles, his money, and his account-books. He set the candle on the table, and

unlocked one of the sedan chairs. At the bottom was an iron chest. He opened it and took out some jewel cases. 'No, my daughter,' he said, 'you cannot appreciate the darlings by this light. See this necklace, Joanna, it is made of pearls, and this brooch is of diamonds, so is the circlet for the hair. Get along with you; light another candle, curse the expense! and put the rose silk dress on you. Do up your hair as if for a ball, and I will try the jewels on you. I allow you a quarter of an hour for rigging yourself out. Take whatever you require, but mind and replace all when you have done; also, don't remove the tickets.'

In about twenty minutes Joanna returned. When she entered she found a brass chandelier hung from the ceiling full of candles and alight, filling the room with unwonted splendour. The Jew sat on his bed rubbing his hands, and when she came in he laughed aloud and clapped his palms on his knees, and kicked his heels against the board at his bedside.

Joanna looked taller in her dress of rose silk. Her neck, bosom, and arms were bare. She had edged the breast and sleeves with rich old lace. Her raven hair was brushed back and rolled over her head, exposing her ears. Thinking her boots too heavy, she had thrown them off, and came in her stocking soles, but as the gown was long her lack of shoes was unperceived. She entered the room of Lazarus without a blush or a smile, perfectly composed in manner, and stood before him under the chandelier.

'Give me the diamonds,' she said.

'No,' he answered, 'you shall have the pearls. An unmarried woman does not wear diamonds. I have a chain of Roman pearls for your hair, and another for your pretty throat.'

Lazarus looked at her with amazed admiration. She was extraordinarily beautiful; her neck long and graceful, her hair rich and lustrous, her features finely cut, and her magnificent eyes full of intelligence. The grub had developed into a gorgeous butterfly.

The Jew contemplated her in silence for some minutes, and then he screamed with laughter.

'Joanna! your hands, your hands!'

She put her hands behind her, and coloured. 'I could find no gloves,' she said, looking down.

'A pair of dirty hands is a badge of honour,' said the pawnbroker. 'Don't be ashamed of them.'

'They are not dirty,' answered the girl, sullenly, 'but grimy

from work. I have washed and washed, but the black grain will not out.'

'Work, work, work!' said the Jew; 'now dance.'

'I cannot. I do not know how,' answered Joanna. 'Give me the jewels.'

He offered her the cases, and she put the pearls about her throat, then wove a chain in and out among her black hair.

'You are very beautiful,' said the Jew. 'If your hands were gloved you would do famously.'

'For what?' asked Joanna.

'For showing off dresses and jewels. When the ladies saw you they'd buy, thinking everything was sure to become them as they suit you.'

Then Joanna said quietly and determinedly, 'Who was Rachel?'

'Rachel, my dear! Bless me, for the moment I had forgotten her. I doubt if even she was as splendid a beauty as yourself, and you are handsome enough. She hadn't your pertinacity. How you do fasten on one, and stick till you have extracted what you require!'

'I want to know who Rachel was.'

'There, sit down in the sedan, and I will tell you.'

'I prefer to stand.'

'Then stand, if you will. It costs less; you are not wearing out the leather of the seat. Besides, I like to look at you. I could sell that rose silk for half as much again if I could show you in it to a purchaser. Well, I'm sorry I said a word about Rachel. Her name slipped off my tongue, when my mouth was ajar. Rachel, my dear—Rachel was my wife.'

'Your wife!—is she dead?'

'No, Joanna, I believe not.'

'Where is she?'

'I do not know.'

'Did she leave you?'

'She was young, only seventeen, when I married her—one of my own faith and race, and beautiful—superbly beautiful. She did not fancy the business. She did not take to the house. Her taste lay in stage plays and dances, and gallivanting. We couldn't agree, and after we had been married about a year she took herself off. How ever she could have the heart to leave all this furniture, and the carpets, and the second-hand plate, and the red coats, and a sweet Florentine marqueterie cabinet

I then had, and afterwards sold for twenty-seven guineas, is amazing.'

'Whither did she go?'

'I do not know.'

'And you do not know where she is now?'

'I do not know.'

'Has she ever shown a desire to return home?'

'Never, never!'

'Would you receive her if she did return?'

'I would not.'

'Why not?'

The Jew was silent. Joanna looked hard at him and asked, 'Did she go alone?'

He sprang from the bed, and paced the room. His face was changed, and Joanna, who watched him, was startled and drew back; the expression of his features was so threatening and repulsive.

'I have told you enough,' he said hoarsely. 'I will tell you no more.'

He continued to pace the room. His face was livid, his eyes glared, his thick coarse lips were tightly drawn, and his fleshy cheeks were lined and shrunk.

Presently he turned his head towards her, but he seemed scarcely to observe her. 'Let me have him firm here, in the hollow of my hand,' he said in hard tones vibrating with passion, 'and I will squeeze and squeeze till the life is squeezed out of him. Let me grasp him, and I will tear him down, him and all his family. I will not spare him, and then I will caper over him, and you shall dance with me up and down and in and out over their broken bones and crushed flesh, and beat out their brains with our feet, and stamp their marrow into the mire.' Then the door-bell rang.

Lazarus stood still, looking about him confusedly. He put his hand to his brow, to help his brain to recover its thoughts. Again the bell rang.

Joanna moved to the door to answer the summons.

'No, no,' said the Jew, 'not in silk attire, not bedecked with pearls. I will go and see who rings.'

CHAPTER XII.

CHARLIE CHEEK.

JOANNA remained standing under the lustre, awaiting her master's return. She heard him in the passage speaking with some one, and then his feet sounded, shuffling in his slippers towards the door, followed by a firmer footfall. Then the door was thrown open, and he stood back, and bowed, to admit Mr. Charles Cheek.

'Good heavens!' exclaimed the young man, 'a lady here!'

'Look at her! Look at her well!' exclaimed Lazarus, crowing and rubbing his hands. 'I'll bet you a foreign coin that you don't recognise my Joanna.'

Charles Cheek looked at the tall, beautiful girl with astonishment, and then broke into a merry laugh.

'Excuse me,' he said, 'but I cannot help myself. One night we meet on the roof of the house, I in evening dress and you in working clothes; and to-night we meet again, under the roof, I in my morning suit and paletot, and you dressed for a ball, and certain to be its belle. Whither are you going, Miss Joanna, for positively I must go there also, and secure you for half a dozen dances?'

'I am going nowhere,' answered the girl, coldly; 'I cannot dance. I am merely dressed, like the block in the milliner's, for the display of the goods.'

'Joanna is going to learn to dance,' said the Jew. 'I intend indulging her in that expensive luxury. She behaved herself, on the whole, well last night, and I must show her my satisfaction. I am a free-handed, liberal-hearted man, as all who have dealings with me can testify.'

'Going to learn to dance, are you?' asked Charles Cheek, looking at the girl with amused curiosity. 'What next—French and the pianoforte?'

Joanna was nettled, and flashed an angry glance at him.

'Now don't she look well?' asked Lazarus. 'Who'd think, seeing her now, that she was drawn out of Laira mud, like a drowned rat, and pawned for ten shillings?'

The girl coloured and her brow darkened.

'Never mind whence she came. I was discovered in a box of preserved figs. She looks as if the rose silk and the

pearls belonged to her, and she was born to wear them. Why, if Joanna were to appear at the hunt or the subscription ball, the gentlemen would swarm round her, and the ladies die of envy.'

'She shall go,' laughed the Jew. 'I will send her there.'

Charles Cheek shook his head and laughed.

'Why do you shake your head?' asked Joanna, looking hard at him.

'It wouldn't do,' he answered.

'Why not?' she asked.

'There are reasons that make it impossible.'

'What reasons?'

'There are none,' broke in the Jew. 'If I choose to send her to the subscription ball, who is to say me nay?'

'You could not send her alone. A lady must chaperone her,' explained the young man, hesitatingly. He did not wish to hurt Joanna's feelings by entering into particulars.

'Why not?' shouted Lazarus. 'If I will that she go, I can find plenty of ladies to take her, who *must* take her because I desire it. Ladies of good position will do me a favour if I ask it. They dare not refuse.'

'I do not dispute your power, Father Lazarus; I say the thing is impossible, because Joanna has too much common sense to venture where she does not know her ground.'

Joanna fired to her temples and said nothing more.

The Jew was more obtuse; he said, 'What! don't she look every inch a lady? It is the dress—the dress makes the lady.'

'Put that rose silk on one of the rowdy women or girls quarrelling or rollicking in the street now, and she will look a bedizened monkey, or something worse. No, Mr. Lazarus; it is not the dress that makes the lady, it is the lady that makes the dress. When are you going to learn dancing, Joanna?'

'I do not know.'

'Where?'

'Here.'

'Who are going to dance with you?'

'No one.'

'Then you will never learn. I will come and be your partner. Lazarus! sweep together some of your Mosaic girls, and I'll bring a friend or two, and we will have the jolliest dancing lessons imaginable.'

The pawnbroker frowned. 'Mr. Cheek, I am not going to turn this house into a casino. I promised Joanna she should learn to dance, and I stick to my word. I can't get my money out of the dancing-master, so I may as well get its worth. That is better than nothing.'

'May I come and help? I am an accomplished dancer.'

'That is as you choose,' answered the Jew; 'only I won't have any of your fast friends here. If you will come in a quiet way, come; only, don't expect to find Joanna dressed up like to-night.'

'Of course she must be in proper attire. No one can dance in working clothes.'

'She has no other.'

'What!—not Sunday clothes?'

'Sunday is nothing to us.'

'What! no go-to-meeting clothes?'

'She never goes to meeting.'

'Nor to church?'

'No.'

'Nor synagogue, nor chapel?'

'No.'

'Good heavens!' exclaimed Charles Cheek, 'what is Sunday instituted for? What are churches and chapels built for, but the display of smart clothes? Lazarus, what a heathen of a Jew you are, not to allow the girl a day on which to shake off her rags and put on fine feathers! Lazarus, we have a little account together; put down the rose silk to it, and let me present it and that necklet of Roman pearls to Miss Joanna. Will you accept the present, my lady Joan, and wear them at our dance rehearsals?'

'I don't know,' answered the girl, looking down.

'Of course she will,' said the Jew, nudging Joanna.

'I said, I did not know.' The girl spoke firmly. 'I will tell you some other time.'

'Will you stop and have a bite of supper?' asked the Jew. 'The festive board is spread. The tin of tomatoes is on the table, so is the bread. True, we have had our light refection, but we will share the remains with you. Water, sparkling and pure off Dartmoor, brought all the way by the great Sir Francis Drake in a conduit. Who'd have thought the great navigator such a fine engineer!'

'Lazarus,' exclaimed the young man, 'I know you can play fiddle; you tried once to sell me a violin for twice its worth,

and played me something on it. Get down an instrument at once, and let me put Joanna into the way of waltzing. She has it in her; a hint, and away she goes. I bet you a sovereign, in a quarter of an hour she will be able to step in a waltz as well as an experienced dancer of seven seasons. Look here, Mr. Lazarus, you whispered the word "supper." I don't like your suggestion of cold tomatoes and cooling draughts. What do you say to pigeon or beefsteak pie and a bottle of champagne?'

The Jew's eyes twinkled. 'Very well,' said he, 'so let it be. I'll run down the street and get what you desire—I cannot send Joanna in her present costume—and be back in three seconds. Then I'll give you a scrape on my fiddle—Strauss or Waldteufel—and do what you can with Joanna. I know her. She don't want twice telling to learn a thing, not she. Of course you pay for the pie and the champagne. I am not responsible.'

'Certainly. Tell me what I have to pay, and I will refund the outlay.'

'Would you mind advancing half a sovereign?' said Lazarus. 'I have only three-halfpence in my purse.'

Mr. Cheek tossed him the money. Lazarus caught it as sharply as a dog snaps at a bit of meat. When Lazarus had disappeared, Joanna looked steadily at the young man, and asked, 'Why is it impossible for me to go to a ball?'

'I did not say that you could not go to a ball.'

'No, you implied that I had too much sense to appear in the society of gentlemen and ladies.'

Charles Cheek slightly coloured, stammered, and said, 'Well, I did mean that.'

'Why?'

'You ask me? Do you not yourself understand?'

'No.'

He thought for a moment, and then he said, 'My girl, you would not think of going to a grand ball as I saw you last night, astride on a gable, a pail in one hand and a mop in the other, clothes and hair streaming with water, and a black smirch of soot across your forehead—with, moreover, a smock in holes, and one slipper on, the other off.'

'No, I would not.'

'Very well. You would appear as you are now.'

'Yes.'

'But more dress than this is expected. Your mind must

be in rose silk and pearls. Your tongue must be in full dress; your manner must be the same. Let me tell you that, among ladies, their tongues and their minds are never with one slipper off, the other on, never with sooty smears across them, but always wreathed with pearls and rustling in rose silk. They have never known anything else. Do you understand me?'

Joanna put her finger to her lips and considered. As she thought, she put forward one of her feet; Charles Cheek noticed it at once. 'Joanna,' he said, 'you are dressed like a princess, but you betray yourself by your stocking. You are not only shoeless, but you have a hole in your sock.'

The girl started, and drew back her foot.

'I do not want to hurt you,' he said goodnaturedly; 'I use this only as an illustration of what I mean. If you were in the society of gentlemen and ladies, you would betray yourself by your stocking holes.'

'I would not wear——' She stopped.

'No. I do not mean stockings. I mean the gaps and shortcomings in speech and culture.'

She looked intently at him for a minute.

'I have never seen real ladies and gentlemen—never, that is, except on business. Are you a real, proper gentleman?'

Charles laughed. 'That is a cruel question, Joanna; I cannot answer it. You must inquire of others.'

Joanna considered again. Presently she said, 'Here I see nothing but raggedness, wretchedness, and care. I know nothing of a richly clothed, happy, and careless world. Here I am surrounded by poverty, and the air is charged with the dust of old clothes and the reek of Laira mud; the light that comes through these windows is never clean; the air is always stale. Why should not I sometimes spring up into the region of light and liveliness? Lazarus often tells me I am a maggot, but a maggot becomes a moth with wings of silver. Am I to be always a grub—never to rise? If Lazarus offers me the chance to have a short flutter, may I not accept it?'

'You are a queer girl,' answered the young man. 'Take care not to leave your proper element. Have you ever heard of the flying fish? The fish have fins so long that they can rise on them a little way out of the waves, and the silly creatures think they are birds; so they spring above the water, and are immediately snapped up by gulls.'

Joanna laughed. 'I am not afraid of that; I am more likely to snap the gulls than the gulls snap me.'

'You are a comical girl,' said Charles. 'It is a pleasure to hear you talk. Are you happy in this den?'

'How can I be? Look about at the den. I will show you where I sleep, on a sack full of shavings under the counter. My food consists of crusts of bread, rinds of cheese, and apple parings, which Lazarus cannot eat. My playground is a back-yard in which the only green thing is the slime on the pavement. Lazarus has no Sundays and I no Sabbaths, so I never have a holiday.'

'Then why do you not leave?'

'Because I cannot. I am pawned.'

'Pawned!'

'Pawned by my mother. I cannot leave. She expects me to remain till she redeems me. There is no help for it. I must abide where I am till she returns.'

'Where is your mother?'

'I do not know.'

'Good heavens! and you are enslaved all this while, without power of obtaining your freedom!—Till when?'

'Till I am nineteen years old—that is, seven years since mother pawned me. If she does not bring the ticket and release me before then——' She did not finish the sentence.

'Well then——?'

'I will kill myself.'

'Nonsense, Joanna. You are a little goose. I can't follow your scruples. I see no right and wrong in the matter—no such obligations as you fancy.'

'I do not suppose you can. You belong to the gentry.'

'Well!' Charles Cheek laughed. 'Have gentlefolks no consciences?'

'No, none at all,' she replied.

'How do you know that?'

'Because I know them through Lazarus' books and the society papers.'

'And you have no other sources of information?'

'I want no other. Lazarus deals with gentlefolks of all kinds, and through his account books and what he tells me I know about most of the officers and officers' wives and gentlefolks of every sort here, and the society papers tell us what the rest are like in London.'

'Every picture has two sides, Joanna. You see only the back.'

'Has society another side?'

'Of course it has.'

'I cannot believe it. The world of men is cut into two halves—the rich and happy and vicious, and the poor and miserable and deserving. I will not say that the poor are good—I see too much of them to assert that, but they deserve what is better than they have. They cannot be good because they are wretched. No one can be good under a hundred and fifty per annum.'

Mr. Cheek laughed. 'Or with an income above that limit.'

'Below that sum, come gnawing care, and grasping for coin, and biting and eating one another. Above that sum, idleness and waste and luxury.'

'And so, you comical socialist, you take as gospel all you read in the society papers, and believe in the utter corruption of the aristocracy.'

'It is in print. What I read is read by tens of thousands. The old woman who sells shrimps and ginger-beer, the bargeman in the coal-boat, the men in Eddystone, the board-school children, all read the society papers, and gather from them convictions that the upper ranks of life are corrupt to the core, and burn with desire to tear them down in the interests of morality, and cast them in the gutter. Why should we lie on sacks of shavings and eat cheese rinds, and never leave the Barbican and escape the smell of Sutton Pool, and they bed in down and fare sumptuously, and go to opera and ball in the season and to their parks or to the sea out of season? I would I had the remaking of the world. I would cut the rich down to a hundred and fifty, and pull up the poor to the same figure. Then we should have an equalisation of happiness. Hark! here comes Lazarus; I hear his key.'

'Joanna, it is rare fun to hear you talk! Tell me, will you accept my present of the dress and chain?'

'I will,' she answered. 'I would not at first, because I doubted whether you laughed at me or pitied me.'

'I certainly pity you.'

'Then I take your present, and thank you.'

The Jew entered, a basket on one arm, a bottle under the other. He was elated and chuckling.

'I have been absent some time,' he said; 'I found the wine merchants closed, and I would not have bad gooseberry at the tavern. Here is the pie'—he opened the basket—'and a dozen raspberry tartlets, and a pound of clotted cream. I understood you to say tartlets, Mr. Cheek.'

'As you will.'

'I am positive you desired me to buy them; I particularly remember that you specified raspberry. Also cream at one and four. The pot I can return, so it will not be charged. I had to carry the cream very tenderly, so as not to spill a drop. Then,' he added, 'I have added my own contribution to the feast, one apiece. "Blow the expense!" said I, "oranges are now at a price within the reach of the poor—twenty-one for a shilling."'

'You will produce your violin?'

'Certainly. I hope Joanna has entertained you whilst I have been away.'

'Famously. She is a comical girl, and I enjoy a talk with her—the first of many, I trust.'

CHAPTER XIII.

THE EMS WATER.

JOANNA was unable to sleep that night. The champagne had excited her brain, and she lay watchful under the counter in the shop, tossing on the sack of shavings. The night was cold, so she had thrown a military greatcoat over her, and a black rug across her feet. She mused on what had taken place—the wonder in the eyes of the young man when he saw her in the silk attire, the interest she had awakened in him by her conversation and her good looks. She had a cool head, and was able to weigh the value of his admiration. She had measured the man. She knew him to be amiable, with fair abilities, but shallow. He was good-natured and weak. He had promised to return, but she placed no reliance on his promises. If he had nothing better to amuse him, he would come, not otherwise. But though she was aware that his liking for her was not deep, easy to be effaced, she was pleased with having aroused a transient fancy. A light had flashed into her dull life. She was unaccustomed to amusement of any sort. She had not associated with the children of the Barbican, nor shared in their games. Her master's unpopularity had affected her; the exigencies of his service had cut her off from social pleasures.

She had spoken to Mr. Cheek with force and freedom on the distinction between the lots of rich and poor. She had spoken more strongly than she felt. Her ideas formulated on her tongue as she spoke. She had no sympathy with the poor; they were the proper prey of a usurer. That they brought wretchedness on themselves by their own recklessness, improvidence, and idleness, she knew very well. She took advantage of their necessities without compunction. But she felt keenly her own condition and her powerlessness to escape from it. The enigmas of life, that lie unperceived in savagedom, rise into prominence with civilisation, and as culture advances become more perplexing and insoluble.

Joanna sat up under the counter. Lazarus was asleep. She could hear his snoring. He was a noisy sleeper, and though his door was shut and locked, his nasal trumpetings were audible in the shop, and annoyed the girl. On the counter above her was a tin case containing a ball of twine; the end of the twine hung down over the edge, and as she tossed on her sack touched and tickled her face. She laid hold of the end of string and threw it up, but it fell back on her face. Then she began to pull at it, and unwind the ball, and rewind on her fingers. The ball seemed interminable. She was engaged on it half an hour, running the twine out and rolling it again. She did it for a distraction, and as she did it the thought came on her that it was thus with her life; she was drawing out yard after yard of existence, all alike, with a knot here and there, all much the same, and then, suddenly—there was an end. It mattered nothing when the end came, the entire string was so utterly uninteresting.

As sleep would not come to her, she shook off the rug and crawled from her bed. The night was cold, and she was partially undressed. Therefore she drew on the military greatcoat. Thus attired, in her stocking soles, she stole out of the shop to the stairs. She had a favourite retreat on the roof, where she could be quiet and think. There she had a few pots of flowers and a little stool. Perhaps the night air would bring drowsiness to her lids. A problem was perplexing her restless mind; she could not sleep with that unsolved. The problem was this: Why were artisans and domestic servants dissatisfied, and why were shopkeepers content with their lot? All were workers alike. Lazarus worked harder than most day labourers; the man at the ham and pork shop worked like a slave, so did the greengrocer, so did the paperhanger next door but one.

These were cheery folk, and did not grumble at their condition. It was otherwise with the journeyman plumber, and carpenter, and the factory hand, and the maid-of-all work. These were impatient of their position and hated their labour.

Joanna traversed the storerooms. The gas-lamp in the street threw in sufficient light for her to see the furniture, and to thread her way without touching and upsetting anything. Had the lamp indeed been extinguished she would have found her way noiselessly about those rooms, and brought from them whatever was required. She went to the window, and looked across the way at the ruin of the house that had been consumed the night before. Every pane of glass was broken ; the entire roof had fallen in. Then Joanna went into the room from which the carpets had been removed to protect the roof, and which still covered it. Here alone was an empty space. Joanna cast off the thick coat, and sprang lightly into the middle, stood on tiptoe and threw about her arms and twirled as she had seen in pictures of ballet-dancers. Then she hummed to herself a waltz of Strauss, and began to dance, with fantastic gesture, the step she had acquired that evening from Charles Cheek.

Presently, fearing lest her tread should disturb the Jew, she reinvested herself in the long grey overcoat, and ascended the ladder to the roof.

The cold air made her shiver, but it was fresh after the close, dust-laden atmosphere of the house. The stars were burning brightly overhead.

She looked at her plants ; several of the pots were knocked down. One was broken, and the earth had fallen from the roots. She had the ball of twine in the pocket of the coat, and she took from it sufficient to bind together the broken sherds. She cut the string with her teeth ; then she put in the earth again. The geranium in the spoutless teapot must come in, and sleep for the winter. The fuchsia must have fresh earth about the roots ; the Guernsey lily needed to be divided. All this would have to be done by daylight on the morrow. Then she took up a pot in which was heather, a little heather in peat she had taken up wild and carried home on one rare occasion when she had been in the country for a holiday, on Roborough Down. She loved the heather above every flower she had, yet it was sickly in confinement. Perhaps it was cold up there on the slates. So she took the pot in her arms seated herself, hugging it, with the greatcoat wrapped

round her and the heather, and began to think. She could not see into the streets from where she sat, as the parapet cut them off, but she saw the yellow haze that hung over Plymouth, the reflection of the lights in the fine vapour that overarched it. The taverns were shut ; no drunken men were about the Barbican. The outline of the citadel stood dark above the harbour. She could see the lighthouse at the pier-head, and far out, reflected in the quivering water, the spark of Mount Batten light. Joanna thought first of her flowers, and then, last of all, of the problem she had climbed to the roof to solve : Why did the labouring class hate work, and the trading class love it greedily ? The girls from the country streamed into Plymouth, because they had been taught to read and write—to read novels and write love-letters—and therefore counted themselves superior to feeding pigs and making butter. They went into service, and when they found that there they were expected to dust chairs and wash up breakfast things they went on the streets. That was an everyday story. They fled work because work was hateful. The young men poured into town from the country to escape the plough and the spade, and when they found that they were expected to work at a trade, they earned their bread with resentment at their hearts, because *prava necessitas* insisted on labour ; and they blasphemed God and dreamed of upsetting the social order because forced to work. Why was this ? The moment, however, that the parlour-maid became a married woman and had a home to care for, she toiled without grudging time or labour. The moment the artisan opened a shop and worked for himself, he was reconciled with Providence and the social system. Why was this ? Unconsciously, Joanna had struck the solution. Content came when man or woman worked for self. Discontent was consequent on working for others. 'This is it,' she exclaimed ; 'to be happy and good one must care only for self, and not a brass farthing for anyone besides.' That was Joanna's philosophy of life, hammered out of her experience and observation.

Having arrived at this conclusion she stood up. 'I am cold,' she said, 'so is the pot of heath. We must go in.' Then she stole downstairs.

Joanna descended very softly, lest she should rouse Lazarus. She listened on the stair for his snore. If that were inaudible, it would behove her to walk warily. He might be lurking in a corner or behind a door, ready to leap forth

with his stick and batter her. No—she did not hear it. She put foot after foot before her most cautiously, listening and peering about her in the dark. Then—she heard a sound, an unusual sound, which made her heart stand still ; she stood with poised foot and uplifted hand to her ear.

The sound came from the back kitchen, and simultaneously she heard the choking snort of Mr. Lazarus in his bedroom.

She crept so noiselessly down the last steps that she would not have scared a mouse, and craned her neck to see who or what was in the back kitchen. In that back kitchen was a low, square window over the sink. Her eyes were sufficiently accustomed to the dark for her to see that the window was obscured by a dark body. She made out that the sash had been thrown up, and that a man was crawling in at the narrow opening. She saw also, by a feeble glimmer, that a second man stood in the outer kitchen, holding a dark lantern, waiting for his fellow to enter as he had come in.

Joanna did not scream. Her lungs were more powerful than when, as a child, her mother had commended her powers of screaming. She knew that if she set up an alarm the first impulse of the burglar would be to stop her voice, and that he would have no scruples as to the manner in which he attained his object. Joanna had matches within reach, but she did not strike a light. She was too wise to expose herself to observation. She preferred observing unseen. She considered what she had better do, and, having rapidly determined, proceeded to take her course with celerity, circumspection, and silence. She stepped, unobserved, from the stair into the passage leading to the chamber of her master and to the shop. She was sure that the burglars would not ascend to the storerooms, to burden themselves with sets of bedroom crockery or chests of drawers. They would look for what was most valuable in the smallest portable form, money and jewels and plate ; and all these were in the bedroom of Lazarus. This was the point of attack that must be defended.

Now the thought crossed the mind of Joanna that she might slip into the shop, close the door between and open the shop door, run into the street and give the alarm ; but her blood was up. She was a brave girl, she was also a girl quickly roused to anger, and she was now, not afraid, but furious. If men had dared to break into her master's house, she was determined they should not leave it without a lasting

lesson not to do so again, at least while she was there to protect it.

Joanna was unprovided with firearms. Lazarus had a revolver in his room, always loaded; but he took time to rouse, being a heavy sleeper. Against the wall ranged in the passage were the bottles of Ems water. Above, on nails hung a large locked saw. She took it down, and removed the wooden cover to the teeth. Then she crouched on the ground, waiting, watching like a terrier at a rat-hole. Her eyes were on the back kitchen door.

Presently she saw the faint light of the closed lantern in the front kitchen, and heard the fall of bare feet on the floor. She raised her arm with deliberation, with eyes riveted on her object, and flung a bottle of Ems water, not under hand, as a girl casts, but as a boy hurls. A gasp, a crash, and a smothered cry! The lantern fell on the kitchen floor. At once Joanna glided forward, secured the lantern, and retired whence she had crept, and covered the light with her coat. The kitchen was dark as pitch. She heard a spluttering and grumbling, then a whispered query from the second burglar—what was the matter? where was the light? Suddenly she sent a ray across the space; it fell on a face with staring eyes, a coarse ragged beard, and a great cut across the brow from which blood was running. That was all. With a click the lantern was closed, the light cut off, and with level directness another bottle struck the same mark.

Then came a scuffle, a cry, and curses. She listened, holding the light under the flap of her greatcoat, and did not stir till she was sure that the burglars, hurt, frightened, bewildered, were scrambling back through the outer kitchen, one falling over or clinging to the other. Then, once again, she sent a beam of light upon them. She let it travel from one to the other. She marked both faces. One man had his hand to his head, and hand and face were smeared with blood. Again she flung a bottle, and the man went down. Then she retired to the shop and put on her shoes. She drew on her shoes because the floor of the kitchen was strewn with broken bottles, and she did not choose to cut her feet. Then she took the saw and pursued the burglars. One was already through the window over the sink, the other was making his way through. With that generosity which is found even among criminals, the uninjured burglar had helped his wounded com-

panion through before he attempted escape himself. Joanna attacked this man with the saw.

Hitherto the only sounds to which they had given vent were muffled cries and groans. Now this second burglar uttered screams terrible to hear.

Presently Lazarus appeared in his nightgown, holding a candle, white with fear, with a pistol in his trembling hand.

'Put down the revolver,' called Joanna. 'I've done the job without you.'

'What is the matter? What is it? Joanna! O Lord! O Lord! Whose are these horrible shrieks?'

'He is like to shriek,' said the girl, wiping her brow with the left hand; 'you'd shriek, I reckon, if sawed at whilst crawling through a little window.'

'What are you doing?' asked the bewildered, frightened Jew.

'Sawing, I tell you,' answered the girl. 'Don't come forward; you'll cut your feet on the broken bottles. There! we are clear of them.'

'Clear of what?'

Joanna quietly shut the sash of the window over the sink.

'I see how it was done,' she said; 'they removed a pane, and so got their hands in to turn the hasp.'

'Who, child, who?'

'Burglars, of course. Who else?'

'Burglars in my house?'

'They won't come again,' said the girl dryly. 'Stay where you are, and let them get away through the back-yard door. They came over the wall, but neither of them is in a fit condition for scrambling now.'

'But, Joanna!'

'When my mother pawned me,' said the girl, 'she said I could scream enough to scare away robbers. I'm older now. I make the robbers scream.'

So Joanna was false to her philosophy ten minutes after having formulated her view of life.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE MONOKERATIC PRINCIPLE.

'You are a capital girl,' said Lazarus, 'and I will not forget what you have done. The Ems water was no loss to cry over, as the demand for it is slack. I am grateful, and to show you my gratitude I will give sound advice.'

'Advice!' echoed Joanna contemptuously. 'That costs nothing. Take mine, and get into your clothes.'

'To be sure I will,' said the Jew. 'Whilst I am getting on my garments, do you, Joanna, see that the back-yard is clear, and bolt and bar the door. I'll provide that the sink window is fastened up to-morrow. Every downstair window but that has iron bars. That, I suppose, was neglected because it looked into the yard. How did they get the window open?'

'Go to your room and get on your clothes, and I'll find out.'

'To be sure. I am shivery, and might catch cold, and be forced to send for a doctor. Look here, Joanna; after this affair there will be no more sleep to-night for either of us, so I will allow you to light the fire. We will sit up and talk matters over till daybreak.' Then he retired to his room, taking the candle with him, and locking his door behind him.

Joanna took the lantern. She examined the window that had been entered. The burglars had affixed a diachylum heart-plaster to a pane of glass, and cut the pane out. By this means it had been removed noiselessly, and was laid outside against the wall, unbroken. She found the door in the yard open, as she expected. The burglars had come in over the wall, but had escaped by means of the door.

She made all the doors fast, and put a tray before the paneless window to exclude the cold. Then she lighted a cheerful fire in the stove. By this time Lazarus was clothed and came out of his room.

'I think,' said he, 'as there is a good fire, we might get the Persian carpet down from the roof and dry it. Always kill two birds with one stone, if they will stand for it.'

Assisted by the Jew, the carpet was brought down and hung on a horse in the kitchen.

Then Lazarus drew his chair to the fire and warmed his palms at the blaze.

'When I consider,' said he, 'the deliberation and coolness with which you worked off those burglars, all I can say is you ought to have been a Jew.'

The girl made no reply. It was a matter of indifference to her whether she were a Jew or a Gentile. She collected the broken stone bottle sherds from the floor and mopped up the slop of mineral water.

'I have been counting the Ems water,' said Lazarus; 'there are but six bottles left.'

'You are not going to make me drink the remainder, are you,' asked Joanna, standing up, 'to show that you are grateful because I saved your house from being burnt and your throat from being cut?'

'No, I am not,' answered Lazarus.

'Whatever you do won't cost you much,' said Joanna.

'Now, don't say that,' Lazarus remonstrated, nettled with the truth of the observation; 'I am not bound to do anything for you.'

'Nor was I bound to save your roof from flames and your throat from the knife.'

'How coarsely you speak!' said Lazarus. Then he was silent, looking into the fire and then at Joanna, with something trembling on his tongue, yet doubtful whether to utter it. Probably he had resolved not to speak, for he merely said to himself, 'Ems ain't bad; but its day is over. Double dahlias one day, single next. Such is the world. So the pendulum swings.'

Joanna continued her work without a reply.

'You are a good girl,' he added, looking into the fire; 'there is a splendid future in store for you, only you don't know it. When that does break on you you will cry out, "O Lazarus! O Lazarus!" and swoon away for delight.'

'I'd rather have something now,' said Joanna; 'the gift of a sheet in winter is better than the promise of a blanket in summer.'

'You are fed, clothed, shod at my expense,' said the Jew. 'Your mind has been formed and your morals moulded by me. You have no cause to grumble.'

'Fed on scraps, clothed in rags, and educated to keep your accounts,' muttered the girl.

'You are discontented, peevish, and don't know when you are well off.'

'Every man knows the warmth of his own jacket,' said Joanna.

'How I've stored your mind with knowledge!' exclaimed the Jew. 'You know the value of an article as well as I, whether furniture, plate, clothing, china. I've taught you a lot of useful information, summing, bookkeeping.'

'What is the good of striking matches for those who don't want light?' asked the girl, sullenly.

'What has put you out of temper to-night, Joanna?'

'I have good reason to be in bad humour. What have I done for Mr. Cheek that he should give me the silk dress and the necklace? Nothing but amuse him for an hour. What have I done for you? Everything. I have saved your house from fire and your throat from the razor. What do I get in return? Nothing.'

'I am not ungrateful,' said Lazarus, seriously. 'Wait a bit longer, my girl, and I will show you that I am not. I cannot tell you now what I will do for you, but I will in time. I promise you this—you shall have a reward such as you have not dreamed to possess. Have I ever failed to keep my word, Joanna? No, never; it don't pay in business to be shifty about promises. Now you have alluded to Mr. Charles Cheek, I wish to speak to you about him, and to give you a word of advice.'

'Which again will cost you nothing,' threw in the girl.

'It is clear to me, Joanna, that Mr. Charles Cheek is interested in you. Now, you are no longer a child. You have swelled on my good fare into a big, handsome girl, not at all of the ordinary type. If Mr. Cheek continues to come here, you are the attraction. I am well pleased that he should come here, and provide beefsteak pie and champagne, and if you behave discreetly all is well. He is weak and careless, and you may entangle him in a web whilst I suck his blood; but let it be understood between us that I will not have you entangled in any thread of his spinning—not caught by finger or toe, Joanna. Keep your head clear and your heart cool. Be very careful of yourself, not to allow the smallest feeling of regard to lodge in your bosom; if you do you lose all control over yourself.'

'What is the advantage of offering a wig to one with a head of hair?' asked the girl, contemptuously. 'I know how

to take care of myself. Tell me now, who is this Charles Cheek?'

'He is the offspring of the Monokeratic principle.'

'Of what?'

'Of the Monokeratic system of business,' answered Lazarus.

'I do not understand.'

'I will explain to you. Sit down, child, on the other side of the fire. Old Joe Cheek—Lord! I knew him well, years ago, with a little shop and a long head. He was in Devonport when he began, but Devonport wasn't a sphere for one like him, so he moved up country. Not content with a small retail shop, he opened a store of combined grocery, haberdashery, stationery, hosiery, wines, drugs, and oriental goods, and sold everything for ready money. Others have done the same, but not on the Monokeratic system.'

'What is that?'

'Well, he advertised all over England, "Try Cheek's Monokeratic system." "Monokeratic" is a Greek word, and means "the unicorn." Cheek's system is the unicorn system. That is the principle on which he does business and realises a great fortune.'

'What is the unicorn system?'

'The system of ready money. Most tradesmen have two systems—the cash system and the credit system, and they do business on both. Cheek does solely ready-money business.'

'So do others, but they don't call it by so wonderful a name.'

'Exactly, and that is why they don't make it answer so well. It is *because* Cheek calls a simple thing by a sounding name that he does a roaring trade. You know nothing, Joanna, worth calling knowledge if you do not know this, that English people love humbug as Italians love oil and Spaniards love garlic. Nothing goes down with them in politics, religion, business, unless it be seasoned to rankness with humbug. Mr. Cheek is sufficiently man of the world to know that, and sufficiently clever to take advantage of it. If old Joe Cheek did as others, and sold for tenpence cash what his neighbours sold for a shilling credit, he would not have many customers, but he has managed very cleverly. Every article is priced at credit value, and when a customer leaves his shop he is given a cheque for the discount. He pays full credit price as cash, and receives the discount back as a cheque to be deducted from his bill when next he purchases at Cheek's. Do you under-

stand? By this means he secures the return of the customer, who thinks he must come back and buy something more so as to recover the money on his cheque.'

'But if he does not go back?'

'Then he forfeits it. He has paid credit price in cash. This is the Monokeratic principle of business. You have no idea what a fascination the name and the cheque exercise on simple people.'

'But what has this to do with the unicorn?'

'Nothing whatever. The unicorn has one horn, and Cheek one way of doing business. That is the connection of ideas. The great charm lies in the word "Monokeratic," of the meaning of which the purchasers have not the smallest idea.'

'And he does a good business?' asked Joanna, interested.

'A roaring business. I wish I did one half as good. I lent him money when starting; but I knew my man. He slipped out of my fingers very quickly.'

'He must have brains,' said Joanna with admiration.

'He has indeed.'

'Then Mr. Charles is his son?'

'Yes—without the brains.'

'Is he in the business?'

'Oh dear no! Charlie is far too fine a gentleman to soil his fingers with trade. He can spend money, but cannot make it. Old Joe Cheek was very anxious to have his son in the concern. His idea was not bad. The old man is a Dissenter and a Radical, and he wanted Charlie to be a Churchman and Tory. Then he calculated each could milk his own cow. But Charlie had not the pluck and energy for it. There is where we Jews have the pull over you Christians. Now and then you have among you a man of genius who makes a business, but the son has not his ability or perseverance, and lets it fall. With us the faculty of business is transmitted hereditarily, like our features; it never fails, leaps a generation, dies out.'

'And Mr. Charles—what does he do with his time?'

'Throws it away. Faculties? Throws them away. Money? Throws it away. He has come to me for money, and I have helped him. The old man turns rusty at times; but everything must go to Charlie in the end, as he is the only son; and then the business also will be thrown away.'

'I suppose,' said Joanna, 'if he be such a fool, he may even throw himself away.'

Lazarus looked at her in surprise. 'You are clever,' said

he, 'but not clever enough to manage that. The thing you must consider is, to keep yourself secure. I don't want to lose you as I lost——'

'Lost what?'

'Rachel.'

'Who ran away with Rachel?'

'Never mind. No one you ever heard of.'

'Where is she now?'

'I have told you I do not know.'

'Is she alone?'

'I do not know.'

'Is he with her?'

'No.'

'I suppose,' said the girl, 'if the burglar had cut your throat to-night, that Rachel would have heard of it, and come and claimed everything—your money, your jewels, your plate—and turned me out penniless.'

The Jew was startled, and looked at Joanna speechlessly.

'You have never been legally divorced?'

'No. I don't fling money among lawyers. We are separated for ever practically, though perhaps not legally.'

'Then she could take everything you have—or had, supposing your throat cut?'

'I suppose so,' was his slowly uttered reply, and he rubbed his legs before the fire, frowning and studying the coals.

'Joanna,' he said, after consideration of some minutes, which she did not interrupt, 'that shall never be. Rather than that I will bequeath everything to you, every stick in the storerooms, and crumb in the larder, and farthing in my chest.'

'That is your most sensible course,' said Joanna; 'that suits me better than stale advice and flat Ems.'

'I will do it,' said the Jew. 'I will write to Crudge.'

'I will bring the pen and ink at once.'

'Not now—there is time. I'll do it some time.'

'That will not suit me,' said Joanna. 'What has to be done must be done on the spot. Do you not see that your interests are at stake? You secure me in the shop, ensuring my caring for everything as if it were my own, protect yourself against peculation by me,' she laughed mockingly. 'You tie me to you as a faithful servant for ever. I shall no more grumble. I shall be active, and on the alert to drive hard bargains. I shall be bound to you Monokeratically.'

'What do you mean? How Monokeratically?'

'By one principle, the strongest of all—self-interest.'

CHAPTER XV.

WANTED, A HOUSEMAID.

A FEW days after the events related in the foregoing chapters, Lazarus plunged into the kitchen with the newspaper in his hand, in hot excitement.

'Joanna!' he exclaimed, 'my dear Joanna, put down the saucepan at once, and follow me into my room. I have something very particular to say. Providence is playing into our hands. Look at the paper, read that!'

He thrust it towards her.

'My hands are wet,' she said; 'I cannot take the paper without reducing it to pulp. Read what you want me to know; I can listen and scour the saucepan.'

'You cannot. I want your close attention. Put down the pan. Here, come into my room, away from the distractions of a kitchen. Take a seat. I have much to explain to you. Now, at last, you may render me valuable service.'

'I have rendered you that for many years. I have recently saved your house from fire and your throat——'

'Do leave my throat alone; you are continually making allusions to it which are painful.'

Joanna followed him into his room, and wiped her hands on her apron. He held the sheet to her, and indicated the lines she was to read. The paper was a Plymouth daily newspaper of local circulation, widely distributed in the West of England. The Jew had indicated the advertisement columns.

'Well,' said Joanna, 'this does not concern me. "Wanted, a housemaid, immediately, in a gentleman's family; steady, experienced, not under twenty, a churchwoman; must have good recommendations. Wages, 16*l*. Apply, Mr. C. Worthivale, Court Royal Lodge, Kingsbridge."'

'It does concern you.'

'Only so far as to show me how little I get working for you. I am not going into service elsewhere—no such luck.'

'But I do want you to go into service with the advertiser.

'What! Leave you?'

'Yes, for three months; then to return.'

'Why so?'

'I will give you my reasons presently.'

Joanna looked again at the advertisement with a puzzled face.

'I am a maid-of-all-work. I am not an experienced housemaid, fit to go into a gentleman's family.'

'That does not matter. There is no mistress—no lady in the house to see if you do your work well or badly. Gentlemen do not care how they pig.'

'Steady,' said Joanna, thoughtfully; 'I am steady as the Eddystone, but I am not more than seventeen, and the advertiser requires a servant to be over twenty.'

'That does not matter. Gentlemen are no judges of the ages of ladies. Besides, you look old for your years.'

'A churchwoman,' mused Joanna; 'I am nothing; I have not been to any place of worship except the board-school, and there we worshipped the inspector. How can I say I am a churchwoman when I've been neither to church nor chapel?'

'That does not matter,' answered the Jew. 'It is all a matter of sitting and standing. When church does one thing chapel does contrary. Go to church for a Sunday or two, and you'll get enough scrape of ideas to pass muster.'

'Then, how about references? I do not suppose a character from you will count heavy.'

'I do not suppose it will,' answered the Jew. 'I'll get Mrs. Delany to give you one, the wife of Colonel Delany—a tip-top respectable party that.'

'She has never seen me.'

'That don't matter. I have lent her money.'

Presently Lazarus said, 'Go to the table, Joanna, and we will rough out a character for Mrs. Delany to put in form and write in her best hand.'

Joanna took a pen, dipped it in the ink, and drew a sheet of old dirty letter-paper before her. 'Go ahead,' she said, somewhat sulkily.

'"Mrs. Delany presents her compliments to Mr. C. Worthivale, and begs to recommend a strong, healthy young woman, who has been in her service three years, with whom she would not have parted on any consideration had not the girl been called to nurse a dying mother."'

'No,' said Joanna, putting down her pen, 'I will not write that.'

'It is as true as the rest.'

'That is not what I scruple about. I will not have my mother mentioned. She may be back any day with my ticket and ten shillings.'

'Very well,' said the Jew, 'then we will make it "white swelling." No—that won't do. Say, "domestic affliction."'

'Domestic affliction,' repeated Joanna after her dictator.

'"When released,"' continued Lazarus, '"Mrs. Delany had supplied her place, and could not in conscience dismiss her new housemaid."'

'Go on,' said the girl. 'I have written as far as "housemaid."'

'Full stop after "maid,"' said the Jew. 'Begin again with a capital. "Mrs. Delany has always found the girl Joanna steady, conscientious, and hard-working; very clean, both in her person and her work; and, though young-looking for her age, is turned twenty."'

'This is the first time you've said a good word for me,' muttered the girl, 'and now it is half lies. Shall I add "eats voraciously and grows at a gallop"?'

'On no account, my dear child. Continue writing from my dictation,' said the Jew; '"Joanna is unable to read or write."'

Joanna laid down her pen. 'Why do you say that?'

'Because it is the best recommendation that can be given. It is as much as saying that you are a good servant. Besides, Mr. C. Worthivale will be less afraid of leaving about letters and account-books if he thinks they are unintelligible to you.'

'I have written after your dictation that I cannot write. Is that all?'

'Yes, that will suffice. I will take the letter to Mrs. Delany, and get her to transcribe and post it—and put the penny stamp on also. You are sure of the situation.'

'You have not told me yet why I am to take it.'

'I will tell you now. Mr. Christopher Worthivale is steward to the Duke of Kingsbridge. I have advanced a great deal of money on the property of the duke—more money than was prudent to put in one bag. The estate is so hampered with mortgages, and the requirements of the duke are so great, that Court Royal must come to the hammer. The family is pretty well in my hands. I have the mortgage on the home estate, which is the same as a grip on their very heart. Now I want you to ascertain for me how matters really stand there. You must pry and discover. I want to know when to close

the trap on the noble duke, and whether I should leave it open a little longer. All the requisite information can be had at the steward's. You will have access to his office, and must look at his books. You are keen of wit as myself, and cunning at accounts as a banker's clerk.'

'I must give up my dancing lessons for this!' exclaimed the girl, pouting, and disposed to cry.

'The dancing lessons! I had forgotten them.'

'I have not; nor Mr. Charles Cheek, and his suppers, and the rose silk dress, and the Roman pearls.'

'You shall have the lessons on your return.'

'By that time Mr. Cheek will have forgotten me.'

'That is possible.'

'But that does not suit me. *I will not go.*'

'I have my plans, Joanna.'

'And I have mine, Lazarus.'

He looked at her for some minutes, irresolutely. Her brow was clouded, her eyes dull; the tears were filling them, and her lips quivered. She restrained the fall of the rain with effort.

'Joanna, I am sending you where you may observe the manners of the gentry. You are sharp enough, and can use your knowledge. You must study their habits of action and their modes of speech. Some day you may have to assume a position in which this knowledge will be of service to you. Remember, you are my heiress.' He opened a locked drawer, and drew forth his will. 'Look! I have kept my word. I have left everything to you. Now, in your own interest it behoves you to see after my investments at Court Royal. Look well at the place. It may be yours some day. Such is the way of the world. That which is at the top comes down, and that which is at the bottom mounts. It is so in every saucepan, in every stew, and the world is but a boiling cauldron where the currents cross one another unceasingly.'

Joanna's face flushed, and the tears disappeared from her eyes, which waxed bright and eager. 'I will go,' she said; 'I will do everything you desire; I will find out everything.'

'Very well,' said Lazarus, laughing. 'Now hunt up the sort of clothes you will need to wear, and let me see how you look in the rig-out of a respectable, sober-minded, and stupid English housemaid.'

After a few minutes she returned.

She had assumed a dark, quiet gown, with a white apron.

She had brushed back her hair, and put on her a pretty white cap.

'Oh ho! on my word!' exclaimed the Jew. 'What sweet simplicity! Holloa, my pert Betsy Jane!' He chucked her under the chin insolently.

Joanna flushed crimson, and, striking him in the chest, sent him staggering back, to tumble over a stool and sprawl on the ground.

'I will do what you bid,' she said, angrily, 'but touch me if you dare.'

Then the shop-door rang, and Joanna heard a voice calling her. She left Lazarus on the floor, rubbing his shin, and went into the shop. There stood Charles Cheek.

'Well now!' exclaimed the young man, 'this is a transformation scene in a pantomime. What is the meaning of this?'

'Mr. Cheek,' said Joanna, 'I have been considering what you said to me the other day. I am going into another element, to learn the manners of the gulls. It is a voyage of discovery. I know no more of the habits and speech and thoughts of those I am going to see than if I were about to visit Esquimaux.'

CHAPTER XVI.

VENITE.

On the last day of November Joanna was deposited with her box at the gate of Court Royal Lodge. A servant came out, and helped her to carry the box round by the back door into the house. She was taken to her room, where she rapidly divested herself of her travelling clothes and assumed apron and cap. The fellow-servant looked critically at her, and said, 'Oh my! how young you be! How many sweethearts have you had? Among them a redcoat, I reckon, if you've been in Plymouth. I should dearly like to have a redcoat. They be beautiful creatures.'

'I have no sweetheart,' answered Joanna.

'Then I reckon you won't be long without one here. There be gamekeepers here and the footmen. But of that another

time. I tell you this is an easy place. There is no missus. There ought to be proper-ly, but the young lady is swallowed up by the folks at the Court, so she is never here. All the better for us. Master is a good sort of a man—very soft. Lets us have our own way, and believes all the crams we tell. As soon as you're ready the master 'll want to see you.'

'I am ready now.'

'And,' continued the servant, 'I'll bet you a shilling I know what he'll say to y'.'

'I never bet. Shillings are too hardly earned to be cast away.'

'I didn't mean naught, really. I'll tell y' exactly what master 'll say. He'll begin like the minister in church: "O come, let us worship, and fall down." He always does with every lady who comes into service here for the first time. There is his bell. I reckon he won't think you can be old enough, judging by your looks. I shouldn't believe you was twenty, if you swore it till black in the face.'

Joanna was shown into the drawing-room, where Mr. Worthivale stood on the mat, with his back to the fire, moving his feet uneasily. He disliked an interview with servants, not from pride, but from consciousness that he was helpless in their hands—a defenceless fort.

'Good day,' he said; 'please shut the door. Miss Worthivale is not here at present, so I must tell you what you have to do. Your name is Joanna?'

'Yes, sir.'

'And your age is twenty?'

'So I am told, sir. I don't remember my birth.'

'I suppose not. Of course not. You are highly recommended to me. Mrs. Delany is the wife of Colonel Delany, of the Royal Engineers, I presume. One cannot make too sure. I turned up the name in the Directory. I understand you have suffered a domestic affliction. I see you wear a black gown. I am sorry. I hope you have not lost a very near relative—not a father or a mother?' He spoke in a kind, sympathetic tone.

'My father is dead, sir,' she answered, looking down and slightly colouring.

'Dear me—how sad! and your poor mother is alone in the world—a rough world for a fresh-bleeding heart to battle with. Have you brothers and sisters?'

Joanna answered, in a low voice, 'None, sir.'

'It must have been a hard matter for your poor widowed mother to make up her mind to part with you. Sad also for you to have to leave her in her bereavement and desolation. Well, you have the comfort of knowing that a Hand is extended over the widow and the fatherless. Don't cry, child.'

Joanna was strangely agitated. The kind tone touched her, conscious of, and beginning to be ashamed of, her false position. Her cheeks darkened and her eyes clouded. She hung her head to conceal her face.

'You must write to your mother by this evening's post. Tell her you have arrived here quite safely, and—I think you may add you are in a house where you will be treated with consideration. Oh! I forgot—you cannot write. I beg you a thousand pardons; it had escaped me. Shall I drop your mother a line? It would comfort her. Or, if you prefer it, get your fellow-servant, Emily, to write. I will let you have paper and envelope and stamp from the office shortly.'

'Thank you, sir,' said Joanna, looking up. She had recovered herself. 'My mother—I do not know where she is. She is not dead, but lost!'

'Good God!—poor child!—Lord bless me!—what tragedies are played in the depths below the surface on which we swim serene! But, for the matter of that,' he added with a sigh, 'there are sad enough stories, cares, and breakdowns about and above us. I suppose happiness and sorrow are pretty equally distributed through all the strata of life—only differing in kind, hardly in intensity. You look very young, my child; I should not have thought you as old as Mrs. Delany affirms.'

'I have had more experience than many who are much older.'

'I have no doubt about that. Trouble and responsibility ripen the character prematurely. Sit down, Joanna; you must be tired with your long journey. I hope Emily has given you something to eat. The drive from the station is long and cold, over exposed moor. Lord bless me! when shall we have a junction line?'

'Thank you kindly, sir, I am not hungry. The cook is going to give me some dinner presently.'

'That is right. I will not detain you long. I must put you in the way of things at the outset, and then all will go smoothly afterwards. I dare say your attention was called to a wall for nearly two miles along the roadside?'

'Yes, sir.'

'Very fine trees on the other side. Unfortunately, the trees are not now in leaf, so that they do not show to advantage. I always think that a park tree in winter is like a man of family without a landed estate. You know he is great, but he does not look it.'

'I saw the trees, sir.'

'Well, Joan. That is your name, is it not? The wall encloses the park, and the trees you saw grow in the park enclosed by that wall.'

'Yes, sir, I understand.'

'The park covers nearly—not quite—a thousand acres, and some of the timber is magnificent.' After a pause, to allow of the absorption and assimilation of what he had communicated, Mr. Worthivale said slowly, 'That park is Court Royal.'

'Does it belong to this house, sir?' asked Joanna, with affected simplicity.

Mr. Worthivale fell back against the mantelshelf, dropped his coat-tails, which must have touched the bars of the grate, as an odour of singed wool pervaded the room. 'Good heavens! what are you thinking of? You must indeed be ignorant, very ignorant, to suppose that so magnificent a park could belong to this humble residence. This house is Court Royal Lodge. Not, you understand, the lodge at the park gates, but an ornate cottage situated on a patch of ground cut out from the park, where was once an overgrown, ragged, and unsightly bed of laurels. His grace was pleased to erect the lodge for my late father. It is the house of the steward. I am the steward.'

'Yes, sir.'

'And the park and the land as far as you can see—that is to say, almost all, not quite all—belongs to his grace the Duke of Kingsbridge. I am the steward of his grace. Now you understand my position.'

'Yes, sir, and I am to be housemaid to the steward of his grace the Duke of Kingsbridge?'

'Quite so,' said Mr. Worthivale; 'you have grasped the situation. Bless my soul! I have burnt my tail. I thought I smelt something. How can I have done that? Now, what I want you particularly to understand, Joan, from the outset is this—the proper manner in which to address those of the ducal family who do me the honour of calling. As it happens, one or other comes here nearly every day. You, of course, have not had to do with people of title at Mrs. Delany's?'

'Mrs. Delany's husband is a colonel, sir.'

'A colonel!' echoed Mr. Worthivale, looking offended and disgusted. 'What is a colonel? Nothing.'

'Then,' continued Joanna, running over the uniforms in Mr. Lazarus's store with a mental eye, 'there was a field-marshal, and an admiral of the Blue, and half-a-dozen generals, and a silk cassock, red hood, and college cap.'

The steward silenced her with a wave of the hand.

'What I particularly wish you to understand, Joan, from the beginning is how you are to comport yourself at the door should his grace, or Lord Edward, or Lord Ronald, or the marquess, or Lady Grace ring the bell. Emily and you will have alternate afternoons at home. She likes to go out every other day, and I dare say you will be glad to do the same; exercise and fresh air are good for health. When Emily is out you will answer the bell. Open that photographic album on the table, and look at the first carte-de-visite—no, cabinet-size portrait. You perceive a venerable gentleman with white hair and fine aristocratic countenance. That is the duke. He does not come here often. He cannot walk so far. If he comes, the carriage brings him. You cannot mistake him if you observe his waxlike complexion, and if you notice that the carriage stands at the gate. It is essential that you make no mistake in addressing him. I could pardon a lapse with the others, but not with him; so impress his features on your memory. When you open the door to him, mind you curtsey. Can you curtsey? The art is dying out. Ask Emily to put you in the way, and practise it till you are proficient. You must address the duke as "your grace." He will probably say, "My child, is Mr. Worthivale at home?" Then you curtsey a second time and say, "Yes, your grace." If I am out—which God forbid!—then say, "No, your grace." If you are uncertain, say, "Will it please your grace to step in, and I will inquire." You understand?'

'Yes, sir.'

'Turn the page, and you will see two dignified gentlemen. One is Lord Ronald, the other Lord Edward. Look at them well. They are like the duke, but have not quite his presence and beauty. They are his brothers—younger brothers, of course—which accounts for their slight inferiority; of course, I mean relative—relative only to his grace. You address them each as "my lord." "Is Mr. Worthivale at home?" "Yes, my lord," or "No, my lord," as the case may be. Here,

Joan, I will go into the passage and knock at the door. Then you open and curtsey, and I will represent—I am ashamed to do it—the Duke of Kingsbridge, and you will receive me according as I have instructed you. Let me see if you have taken the lesson to heart. After that I will represent Lord Ronald or Lord Edward. Let me have the satisfaction of knowing that you have apprehended my instructions.'

So Mr. Worthivale rehearsed with Joanna what he had taught her. He was void of all sense of humour, and unconscious of the absurdity of his conduct, and that the girl was laughing in her sleeve.

'Turn the page again,' said the steward. 'You see the marquess. You address him also as "my lord." You understand?'

'Yes, sir,' said Joanna, distractedly. She was looking at the next portrait with interest. 'Oh, sir! please, sir, who is this beautiful lady?'

'That lady is as perfect and sweet in mind and soul as she is in feature,' answered Mr. Worthivale. 'That is the Lady Grace Eveleigh. And, remember, she is not Lady Grace, but *the* Lady Grace. A Knight's wife is a Lady, you know. *The* makes all the difference in the world. Everyone who knows that lady loves her, she is so good, so kind.'

'I am sure they do,' said Joanna, eagerly. 'I am certain I shall love her, too.'

The steward was pleased; he smiled and nodded. 'You will address her as "my lady," you understand?'

'Yes.'

'Turn the page again, and you will see a photograph of Court Royal.'

'That house?' inquired the girl; 'why, it has got pillars before the door just like the Royal Hotel at Plymouth.'

Mr. Worthivale shuddered and drew back.

'My good girl! For heaven's sake don't liken a ducal mansion to—to—an—an inn, however respectable and old established. It is possible that the Royal Hotel may have a portico——'

'It has two,' said Joan, eager for the credit of the Plymouth house. 'Has this place got two? I only see one in the picture.'

Mr. Worthivale was silenced; he coloured, and looked down on the rug, frowning. Court Royal had but one portico. Presently he said in an embarrassed tone, 'It may be true—I

do not dispute it—that the inn in question has two porticos. But there is a difference, my girl, between porticos. Some are shams, shabby, and stucco; two, even five, porticos would be insignificant beside one real portico, such as that which graces the front of Court Royal. The pillars are of granite, red granite from Exmoor. When your eyes rest on the mansion you will feel at once the temerity of drawing comparisons between it and—and—an inn. Upon my word, I think you had better go there at once—that is, after you have had something to eat and drink. By the way, do not speak of the mansion as "the house;" that is scarcely respectful, and is contrary to usage. You mention it always as "the Court." You shall go down, Joan, to the Court after you have partaken of some refreshment. I will write a note which will serve as an excuse for sending you. When there, ask to see the housekeeper, Mrs. Probus, a most admirable woman. She will show you over the state apartments. His grace is out. He has gone for a drive. I saw the carriage pass half an hour ago, and unquestionably the Lady Grace is with him. Lord Edward is away, back at his Somersetshire living, superintending the preparations for Christmas and the charities. The marquess, I have no doubt, is out shooting, and you are not likely to come across Lord Ronald. Mrs. Probus knows what to do and where to take you. Rely upon her. Do not put off your walk too late. The days close in rapidly, and I want you to see the Court to advantage, and to be impressed by the influences of the Place and the Family.'

CHAPTER XVII.

STOCK-TAKING.

JOANNA was given the letter by Mr. Worthivale, and walked through the park to Court Royal. The evergreen shrubs on both sides of the drive relieved the monotony of winter bleakness. The pines were clothed; of them there was great variety. The oak, though turned brown, was not divested of all its leaves. The day was fine and the air mild. Joanna knew nothing of the country; she was surprised at and delighted

with all she saw. She stood watching the fallow deer, till she was frightened by the rush past her, on wing, of a pheasant. The wood-pigeons were flying in hundreds from one beech clump to another, rejoicing over the fallen masts. The afternoon sun shone yellow over the front of Court Royal, making the windows glitter like sheets of gold leaf. Joanna went round to the back of the house, and delivered her letter and message. She was taken into the servants' hall, where some of the maids were receiving visitors from Kingsbridge, and stuffing them with veal pie, ham, tarts and clotted cream. They ate cream with their ham, heaped it on their bread, and jam on top of the cream equally deep ; they drank it with their tea, and filled the cups with lump sugar till the lumps stood out of the tea like Ararat above the flood. Some of the servants' friends had brought their children with them ; these over-ate themselves, were unwell, retired, and came back to repeat the process.

Joanna looked on in amazement. She was invited to take her place with the rest, but declined, as she had dined recently.

Then the housekeeper came in, smiled benevolently on the visitors, bade them enjoy themselves, and called Joanna away to see round the Court.

The housekeeper had been bred in the traditions of the knowledge and love and fear of the great Kingsbridge family. Her father had been a footman, her mother (a lady's maid in the service of the late Duke), who had married and kept the lodge. The first recollection of her infant mind was being noticed as a healthy, pretty child, by the late Dowager Duchess. She had been educated, gratis, at the school supported by his Grace, a school which had in its window the Ducal arms and supporters in stained glass, and outside, in the gable, the Ducal coronet and initials of Bevis, seventh Duke of Kingsbridge. At an early age she had served the family by opening the gates of the drive, and had worshipped the family with curtsies before she had been found old enough to go to church and worship God. Then she had been taken into the Court, and been a servant there all her life, first in one capacity, then in another, till she married the red-faced coachman, who wore a white wig and sat on a hammercloth emblazoned with the Ducal arms. Upon the death of the coachman, Mrs. Probus returned to the great house as housekeeper. It was unnecessary for her to do so. She had saved, during her long service,

a good deal of money. The pickings had been considerable. But the pickings were too considerable, the living too good, the work too light to be resigned hastily, and Mrs. Probus felt that it would be banishment to hyperborean night to be consigned to an almshouse for the rest of her days, away from the splendour of the Ducal system, illumined only by the flicker of consciousness that the almshouses had been founded for the reception of worn-out Ducal retainers. So, though Mrs. Probus often spoke of retiring, she postponed the evil day.

Her little sitting-room, into which she introduced Joanna, was furnished with memorials of the Eveleighs. Over the chimney-piece, of course, was the portrait of the present Duke; over the sideboard, the picture of the late Duke. On the cheffonier were the silver tea-kettle given her by the Duke on her marriage, and a silver salver with a long inscription, presented to the late lamented coachman on his completion of the fiftieth year of service. On all sides were presents—remembrances of the Dowager Duchess Anna Maria, of the late Duchess Sophia. On her bosom she bore a brooch containing the hair of the Marquess and Lady Grace, whom she had nursed as infants; and about her finger was a white ring woven of silver hair, cut from the head of Frederick Augustus, sixth Duke of Kingsbridge, Marquess of Saltcombe, Viscount Churchstowe, Baron Portlemouth, Baronet, Grand Commander of the Bath, Knight of the Garter, of Saint Patrick, of the Black Eagle, etc. etc. etc., cut off his head when she had laid him out for burial.

Mrs. Probus was proud to show the house to Joanna. When she learned that Joanna was the new servant come to the Lodge, she understood at once that she had been sent down there to be impressed, and Mrs. Probus was never happier than when stamping the Ducal family on young minds. A reverent fear and love of the family was the best preservative youth could have against the trials and temptations of life. It would save a girl from flightiness. Everyone who moved in the Kingsbridge system was respectable to the tips of little finger and little toe. Imprudence was impossible to one nurtured in the Kingsbridge atmosphere. When the butler heard of a young man who had taken to drinking and gone to the bad, 'Poor fellow,' he said, 'if only he could have been received as a stableboy here!' When the housekeeper was told of a young woman who had lost her character, 'How dreadful!' she exclaimed; 'would that she had been kitchen-

maid at Court Royal!' As the monks and nuns of old believed that salvation was hardly possible outside the cloister, the domestics in the Kingsbridge constellation held that no one went to hell from Court Royal or Kingsbridge House, Piccadilly. The same feeling pervaded the entire estate. The tenants were steeped in it. They were all respectable; the farmers Conservative, churchgoers, and temperate; their wives clean and rosy-cheeked, attending to their dairies themselves, and curtseying like schoolgirls, and standing with their hands under their aprons, when visited by one of the family. The cottagers reared their children to abstain from evil and do that which is good, because there was a great Duke far above them who knew everything that went on upon his estates, and who, if the children were clean and respectable, would take them up into service in the Great House, and provide for them and make them happy for ever. No more moral, respectable, orderly, religious people were to be found in the West of England than those on the Kingsbridge estate; but all this morality, respectability, order, and religion rested on the foundation of the love and fear of the Duke. One Sunday, when the Rector's wife was catechising the school children, she inquired who were 'the elect people of God,' whereupon they responded, as with one voice, 'The tenants of the Duke, ma'am.' And what they said, they believed.

Mrs. Probus took Joanna up the grand staircase, turning and glancing at her face at the landings, to see that the proper expression of wondering awe was there. She bade her look at the pictures, and narrated the hackneyed story of their acquisition on the Continent by the great Duke who was a general in the reign of George I. The keen eyes of the girl were in every corner, not on the pictures, which she did not understand, but on the cabinets, the Chinese vases, the pile carpet, the exotic ferns. In the state drawing-room she made a halt, and caught her breath.

'O my goodness!' she gasped; 'the Chippendale!'

'The *what*?'

'The Chippendale!' exclaimed Joanna. 'What first quality chairs and tables and cabinets. Why, they are worth a pot of money, just now that the fashion runs on Chippendale.'

'Of course the furniture is valuable,' said Mrs. Probus with dignity. 'But pray do not speak of it as though it were about to be sold at an auction.'

'And the china!' cried Joanna excitedly. 'That pair of

Sèvres vases any dealer would give a hundred pounds for, and ask for them two hundred and fifty, and take two hundred.'

'No doubt the vases are precious. They were given to the late Duke by King Charles X. from the royal manufactory.'

'That nude figure of a woman seated on a dolphin is fine,' said Joanna. 'Oh, please may I look at the mark? Double C crowned—Ludwigsburg, modelled by Ringler. Look at the glaze. Observe the moulding!'

'It is scarcely delicate,' said Mrs. Probus.

'On the contrary, it is most delicate, and considering the delicacy in admirable condition. Only some of the flowers on the pedestal are chipped.'

'I did not allude to the fragility of the china, but to the impropriety of a lady going about with only a scarf over her. However, the subject must be right, or it would not be here.'

'Of course it is right,' said Joanna, excitedly. 'It is splendid; worth thirty pounds to a dealer, double to a purchaser. That is a pretty First Empire clock.'

'It don't go,' said Mrs. Probus.

'Who cares for that?' answered Joanna. 'The shape is the thing. The ornaments are very chaste. There you have some old Plymouth.'

'You seem to know a great deal about porcelain.'

'I do know something.'

'Ah, you ought to see the collection the Marquess has in his room. He is a fancier, and does not care what he pays to secure a piece to his taste.' The housekeeper was gratified at the enthusiasm and delight of the girl.

'May I—oh, may I see it?'

'Let me see—the Marquess has gone out. I think it would be possible, though not allowed. We may not show strangers over the private apartments inhabited by the family. Still, this is a different case; you are a servant, almost I may say, of the family, as you are in the house of the steward. Follow me through the dining-room. I must show you the Rubens and Ostades and Van Dycks, and the Murillo bought by the late Duke Frederick Augustus; he gave for it seven thousand pounds.'

Joanna sighed. 'I am ashamed to say I know nothing of the value of pictures. That requires a special education, which I have not had. It is a branch of the business—' She stopped abruptly, and then said, 'I dare say you have a catalogue of the paintings, which you could let me have. I should so much

like to know what you have here ; what to admire. Then, on another occasion, I shall be better able to enter into the merits of the pictures. You see, ma'am, with so much that is wonderful about one, the mind becomes bewildered. I will not look at the paintings to-day, I will look only at the china and the furniture.'

'Certainly,' said the housekeeper, 'what you say is just. I will give you a printed catalogue—privately printed, you understand.'

'That is a magnificent inlaid Florentine cabinet,' said Joanna ; 'worth a hundred guineas. Oh, what treasures you have here !'

'Treasures indeed,' said Mrs. Probus ; 'you see their Graces the Dukes of Kingsbridge have always been patrons of art, and have collected beautiful things in their travels through Europe.'

'If only there were to be a sale here——'

'Sale !' exclaimed the housekeeper ; 'good heavens above ! What do you mean ? Sale !—sale in a Ducal mansion ! Young woman, restrain your tongue. The word is indecent.'

She tossed her head, frowned, and walked forward stiffly, expressing disgust in every rustle of her silk gown and in the very creak of her shoes.

'I beg your pardon, ma'am. I was dazzled, and did not know what I was talking about.'

'Oh,' said Mrs. Probus, 'that alters the case. Now we are in the wing containing the private apartments. Here everything is more modern and comfortable. You admire the flowers I perceive. Yes, there are camellia and ferns in the corridor. If you like it, I will conduct you over the conservatories—not now—presently. His Grace sets great store on the greenhouses and the winter-garden.'

'Dear ma'am, I should so greatly like to see them. I love flowers above everything in the world. I have only five little pots at home, on the roof, and one of them contains a bit of wild heather I dug up with my scissors, on the rare occasion of a holiday. Now that I am away, I do not know who will attend to my poor plants, and whether I shall find them alive when I return. I have no one in the world whom I can ask to do a thing for me.'

'This is the apartment of Lord Ronald,' said the housekeeper. 'I will not show you in there. It contains nothing of interest—that is, nothing very extraordinary. His lordship was a soldier, and loves to have everything plain. No doubt

it contains much that would interest military men, but such as you and me don't understand those pursuits. Here is the Marquess's door. Wait a moment, whilst I tap and peep in to make sure he is out. I am sure he went out shooting, I saw him with the keeper and the dogs—that is,' she corrected herself, 'I saw the keeper and the dogs with him.'

Mrs. Probus tapped timidly, and then opened. 'Look about you,' she said, 'at the costly china. He is out, as I supposed. It is very bold of me to enter and introduce you. See what abundance of porcelain there is here. The Marquess is most particular. He will not allow the housemaids to touch it. When dusty, Lady Grace takes it down and cleans it. He allows no other fingers than hers to touch his valuable collection.'

'How pretty the flowers are,' said Joanna, looking at the bouquets on the table and on the chimney-piece. 'So many posies—and specimen glasses everywhere.'

'Lady Grace always arranges them for her brother,' answered the housekeeper.

'No wonder that they are lovely,' said the girl. 'I should so much like to see Lady Grace.'

'You will do so some day. Yes—' she said, as she saw that Joanna was looking at a miniature on the wall over the fireplace, 'that is her ladyship when she was younger—when she was about eighteen.'

Joanna looked at the portrait with interest for a long while. Reluctantly, at last, she turned away and began to examine the china.

'This is Chelsea,' she said, contemptuously, 'bad of its kind.'

'It cannot be bad,' protested Mrs. Probus, 'or it would not be here.'

'This group—' began Joanna, putting forth her finger.

Mrs. Probus arrested her hand. 'For heaven's sake do not touch. You might break—and then—dear life! I should sink through the floor in shame and sorrow.'

'I shall not break anything,' answered Joanna. 'I could walk like a cat among Dresden figures, or a best Swansea service, and not upset or injure one article. Besides, if that group were broken, what odds! It is a modern imitation.'

'What! a connoisseur among my china! Condemning it, moreover!'

Mrs. Probus turned, shivered through all the gathers of her silk gown, raised her hands deprecatingly, and turned pale.

Joanna looked round at the speaker and recognised the Marquess from the photograph she had been shown. She said, with perfect composure, 'Yes, my lord, this piece is not genuine. I can tell it by the colour of the glaze.'

'Indeed! I gave a long price for it.'

'You were taken in, my lord. It is not worth fifteen shillings.'

'Oh, my lord,' gasped Mrs. Probus, 'I beg your pardon ten thousand times. I thought you was out, and I dared take the liberty—the inexcusable liberty—of bringing this young person in, who pretended to be interested in porcelain—and her to dare and say your lordship was taken in! You'll excuse my audacity, my lord, I pray, and her ignorance and impertinence.'

'My dear Probus,' said the Marquess, smiling, 'I am over-pleased to have my collection shown to one who has taste and knowledge, and discrimination.' Turning to Joanna, he added, 'I believe, to my cost, that you are right. Doctor Jenkyn, who knows more about china than anyone else in this county, has pronounced unhesitatingly against this piece. You are of the same opinion.'

'I know it, my lord. I know where it was made. There is a manufactory of these sham antiques. I can tell their articles at a glance.'

'You seem to have an accurate eye and considerable knowledge.'

'In my former situation I was with a master who collected china, and so I learned all about it—if I broke any, I got whacks.'

'Don't be so familiar,' whispered Mrs. Probus, greatly shocked.

'And,' continued Joanna, 'my master, after a while, so trusted my judgment, that he would let me spend pounds on pounds on porcelain for him.'

'Were you never taken in?'

Joanna laughed. *She* taken in! 'Never, my lord.'

'I should like to know your opinion of these bits of Chelsea.'

'I have already given it,' said Joanna, disregarding the monitions of the housekeeper. 'I told Mrs. Probus it was a lot of rubbish.'

The Marquess laughed.

'Right again. That is exactly Dr. Jenkyn's opinion, not expressed quite as forcibly as by you.'

'Here, my lord, you have a charming little Dresden cup

and saucer; really good; canary yellow, with the cherubs in pink. It is well painted, and good of its kind.'

'Keep it,' said the Marquess. 'I make you a present of it as a remembrance of my den which you have invaded.'

'Thank you, thank you! this is kind,' said Joanna, with sparkling eye. 'I will never part with my little cup, never; and I beg pardon, my lord, for having persuaded Mrs. Probus to bring me in here, against her better judgment. It was not her fault, it was mine. I entreated her to let me see your china.'

'Not another word; you are heartily welcome. If I want to buy china again, I will consult you.'

Joanna withdrew with a curtsey. Lord Saltcombe signed to the housekeeper to remain behind.

'Who is the little china-fancier?' he asked, in a low tone.

'Oh, my lord! I am so ashamed. Only the new housemaid at the Lodge.'

'Indeed! How education advances!' laughed the Marquess. 'In the march of culture we are being overtaken. Who would have supposed to find a housemaid so thorough a connoisseur? Well, she looks brimming over with brains, she has plenty of assurance, and is deucedly pretty.'

CHAPTER XVIII.

LADY GRACE.

The words of commendation spoken by the Marquess were sufficient to make Mrs. Probus think of Joanna with more favour than before. She had recovered from her panic, Joanna had cleverly taken all the blame on herself, so the old woman's face was wreathed with smiles, and she professed her readiness to show the girl whatever she desired. The Marquess had pronounced on her abilities—a word of commendation from him was enough for Mrs. Probus.

'I daresay, my dear,' said she, confidentially, 'that Mr. Blomfield, the butler, will let you see the plate.'

'I am a judge of plate,' said Joanna, gravely. 'I know the hall marks on silver as I do those on china.'

'You do? Lord bless me!' exclaimed the housekeeper.

'Well, what is education coming to? That shows his lordship was right. He said you had brains.'

'Did he? Then he can judge people as I judge china. I should very much like to see the plate.'

Mr. Blomfield did not require much pressing; he was proud to show the splendour of the house in his department. He allowed Joanna to enter the plate room, and he opened for her the iron doors of the cupboards in the wall, and exhibited the shelves, lined with green cloth, on which shone centre-pieces, goblets, urns, tea and coffee pots, spoons and forks, salvers large and small, candlesticks and candelabra. All were in perfect order, shining brilliantly.

'This,' said Mr. Blomfield, opening another case, 'contains very old family plate. It is only brought out on the grandest state occasions. Here is a silver gilt ewer, magnificently chased, said to be three hundred years old; the present Duke was baptized out of it, but I believe it was a punchbowl formerly. Much of this is admired, but I cannot say I like it. The forks have but two prongs, and the spoons are rat-tailed. There is no accounting for the taste that can admire such things as these.'

'I suppose, sir, you have an inventory of all the plate,' said Joanna timidly, raising her large dark eyes to those of the butler.

'Of course, miss, I have; and I go over it with the steward on occasions. Very proper it should be so, though a mere matter of form. You will not find many mansions where there is such choice of plate. There is a great salver which was presented to Field-Marshal John, Duke of Kingsbridge, when he was Lord Saltcombe, in King George's reign, by the mayor and citizens of Ghent. I've heard,' continued the butler, 'that in some of your parvenu families there is a lot of plate, a great and vulgar display—but the quality is not there. All this is old and fine, and in good style. The new plate looks to-dayish; there is not the character about it that our ancestral store possesses.'

'Do you know, sir, what you have got in each cupboard?'

'Of course I do, miss. Do you not see that a list of the contents of each is pasted against the iron door, inside? And with the list is the weight in silver and gold.'

'What is the weight of the whole amount of silver, Mr. Blomfield?' asked the housekeeper.

'I have never counted,' was his reply. 'It is easily done; sum the totals affixed to each list on the doors.'

'I should dearly like to know,' said Joanna. 'Where I was before I came here there was a good deal of plate; but nothing like this, oh, nothing!'

'I suppose not,' said Mr. Blomfield with dignity. 'No one with a title, I suppose?'

'Oh dear no. What about now, do you think, sir, is the weight?'

'I will take the numbers down and add them up,' said Mrs. Probus good-naturedly.

'Excuse me, sir,' said Joanna; 'you have a very beautiful bread-basket there. Might I look at it more closely, and see the hall mark?'

'Certainly.' He handed the basket to her. Joanna looked at the handle. 'It belongs to the reign of William and Mary. The year I cannot say without a book.'

'Dear, now! To think you have found that out! I have had to do with plate all my life, and know nothing more of the marks than to look for the lion and the head.'

'Here is the sum of the weight of plate,' said Mrs. Probus. 'The silver in this column, the gold in that.'

'All that?' exclaimed Joanna. 'Why, the silver at six-and-six an ounce, without allowing anything for workmanship, is—five thousand ounces—sixteen hundred and twenty-five pounds; but it would sell at a pound an ounce. Five thousand pounds' worth of plate at the lowest.'

'You can calculate pretty quickly,' laughed the butler.

'The Marquess said she had brains,' said Mrs. Probus aside to Mr. Blomfield; 'he was quite taken with her cleverness.' Then to Joanna, 'Now I will show you over the conservatories. You may keep the sum of the plate if you like.'

'Thank you,' answered Joanna. 'I shall like it very much.'

Joanna was one of those children of this century, and of town civilisation, in whom shrewdness and simplicity, precocity and childishness, are strangely mixed together. When in the house among the furniture, china, and plate, she was reserved, observant, calculating, storing her observations in her retentive memory, prizing everything she saw; but when she entered the greenhouses, that calculating spirit left her, and she was an unspoiled girl, overflowing with fresh delight, full of exuberant spirits. In the house, amidst the artistic valuables, she was in a world with which she was acquainted; in the conservatories

she had passed to another and unfamiliar sphere. She had been reared in the midst of manufactured goods, apart from nature; now she was introduced to nature's best creations. Mrs. Probus was amused at the girl's expressions of rapture at the beauty of what she saw. Grapes she saw for the first time hanging from the vines, and oranges shining among the glossy leaves of the trees, side by side with silvery flowers. The dwarf apricots and nectarines were still burdened with fruit.

When she saw the flowers her excitement was unbounded. She laughed and cried at once. Her cheeks flushed, her eyes sparkled, hands and feet were in incessant agitation. The primulas, the cyclamen, were in full, delicate bloom. The wax-like camellias, white and crimson, were in flower; chrysanthemums, screened from frost, were in tufts of every colour. The air was scented with white Roman hyacinths.

'Oh!' cried Joanna, with hands uplifted, 'I would that the Barbican and all the world would sink into the ocean, and leave me alone here, to be happy with the flowers, for ever.'

At that moment the door from the next, the orchid house, opened, and Lady Grace Eveleigh appeared, dressed in silvery grey, with a quiet, close bonnet on her head. She looked at the excited girl with a sweet, confidence-inspiring smile, and came forward.

'Dear alive, my lady!' exclaimed Mrs. Probus, 'I am a most unfortunate body to-day. I took the liberty of taking this young woman through the conservatories, without a thought that your ladyship was here. I have been unfortunate, indeed, this afternoon.'

'Not at all, not at all, Probus,' said Lady Grace, 'I am always delighted that others shoulde njoy our pretty flowers. You like flowers,' she added, turning to Joanna, her voice soft as the cooing of a dove.

'I love them,' said the girl, clasping her hands together.

'What were you saying as I came in?' asked Lady Grace.

Joanna answered, half laughing, half crying, 'I said that I wished the world would sink under the sea and leave me alone with the flowers.'

'That was rather a selfish wish,' said Lady Grace. 'Do you not care that others should share your pleasure?'

'No, not at all,' answered Joanna, bluntly.

'Excuse her, my lady,' put in Mrs. Probus, with a frightened look, 'she doesn't mean really to differ from your ladyship; she doesn't understand what she says.'

'I do! hold your tongue,' said Joanna, turning sharply on the housekeeper.

'Do not trouble yourself, dear Probus. Whoever loves flowers has a kindred feeling with me. I love them with all my heart.' She looked at Joanna, who stood undecided what to say or do. Then, turning to Mrs. Probus, she said, 'Will you do me a favour, and yield your place to me, nurse? Let me take her round the houses. You do not know the pleasure it gives me to show the flowers to one who can feel towards them like myself.'

'Very well, my lady,' said the old woman, 'but you must not take it amiss—if this young person——'

'I shall take it greatly amiss,' interrupted the lady, 'if she does not admire what I admire. I can see in her bright eyes that she is happy with my pets. Leave us alone together; we shall perfectly understand each other. We flower fanciers have a language of our own, understandable among ourselves, sealed to outsiders.'

When Mrs. Probus was gone, Lady Grace, looking kindly into the girl's excited face, asked, 'Will you tell me what is your name?'

'Joanna.'

'Joanna!' repeated Lady Grace. 'That name is uncommon. It is pretty, very pretty, and quaint. I like it.'

The girl flushed with pleasure and pride.

'I am glad you like it,' she said; 'I never thought a button about my name before. Now I shall like it.'

'I hope you like Probus,' said the lady. 'She was my nurse long, long ago. She used to scold me a little and caress me a great deal.'

'Please, my lady,' Joanna spoke timidly, 'may I go very, very slowly along, because all this is so new and so beautiful that I cannot bear to miss anything. Mrs. Probus walked so fast, and was afraid of staying long anywhere.'

'I will go as slow as you like, and stop as long as suits you beside any flower. That is a yellow primula; look, under the leaves is white flour, it comes off on your finger, and that gives the plant its Latin name. It has a sweet scent. Whence do you come from, Joanna?'

The girl pointed downwards.

The questioner looked at her with surprise, not understanding the significance of the indication.

'Out of the depths. Picked out of the mud—true as my word unvarnished,' explained Joanna.

'So is it with the water-lily,' said Lady Grace, 'one of the purest and most glorious of flowers. Its roots are in the basest slime, its flowers in the sunshine without soil. I am sure, Joanna, you will grow up as the water-lily.'

The girl shook her head. 'You don't understand. I am not a flower, but a grub.'

'And the grub becomes a butterfly, that soars far above the garbage on which it crawled and fed.'

'I can never be a butterfly.'

'You can rise.'

'I am rising,' said Joanna, firmly; 'I intend to rise. But you think your way and I think mine. You rise your way, which I cannot understand or copy, and I rise mine as I may, in whatever direction chance gives me an opening.'

Lady Grace looked into the girl's face and tried to decipher its language. She saw that the mind was full of intelligence, precociously developed. She saw that ideas were working which Joanna was powerless to express. The girl misunderstood the intent look of the lady, and said, 'I have made you angry. Everyone here is taught to agree with you. I say what I think. Whether it jumps or jars with the opinions of others matters little to me.'

'I like you to speak out of your heart freshly what you think.'

'Then,' said Joanna, eagerly, 'I think there is not a flower in all this place so sweet and so beautiful as you, lady.'

'You must not say that.' Lady Grace coloured.

'Why not? It is true.'

'No, it is not true.'

'I think it.'

'Never mind. Do not speak such things. I do not like them, and they will make me distrust you.'

Both were silent for a few minutes, and then Joanna said, 'How very, very happy you must be here, my lady.'

'Yes,' answered the lady, in her soft, sweet voice, in which was a tone of sadness, 'I am happy.'

Joanna noticed the omission.

'Why do you not say *very* happy?'

'I am indeed happy and thankful.'

Joanna now looked at her as intently as Lady Grace had previously observed *her*. The expression on Joanna's face was

one of perplexity. At last she said, 'I don't understand, and I can't understand.'

'What, Joanna?'

'My lady, you do not and you cannot understand me, and I do not, and try as I may I cannot, understand you. We belong to different worlds.'

'And are forgetting the bond between us—the flowers.'

Presently Lady Grace pointed to an arcade, where, against the wall, oranges, limes, and citrons were growing.

'Do you notice these trees?' she said; 'they are very ancient, one or two of them are as much as two hundred years old.'

'What a pity!' answered Joanna; 'they must be worn out. You should stub them out and plant new, improved sorts.'

Lady Grace went into the vinery, and brought thence a large bunch of green Muscatel grapes on a leaf. She presented it, smiling, to Joanna.

'It is a pleasure,' she said, 'to have grapes for the sick and those who have no vineries of their own. They do enjoy them so greatly.'

'Do you give grapes away?'

'Yes, of course we do.'

'But you might sell them and make a lot of money—enough to pay the gardener's wage.'

Lady Grace coloured and laughed. 'We couldn't possibly do that.'

'Why not?'

'For one reason, because then we should have no grapes to give away.'

'But you are not obliged to give them away?'

'To the sick, of course we are.'

'Why of course?'

'Why, *because* they are sick.'

'They should buy grapes for themselves if they require them.'

'They are poor, and cannot do so.'

'Then let them do without. You are not bound to them, nor they to you.'

Lady Grace, with a little sadness on her brow, but a smile on her lips, said, observing her, 'It is a pleasure to give them what they cannot get themselves. There, it is a greater pleasure to me to watch you enjoying that bunch of Muscatel than if I were eating it myself.'

Joanna shook her head. 'We belong to different worlds,'

she said. 'If these greenhouses were mine I would keep everyone out but myself, and I would spend my life in them, looking at the flowers and eating the grapes.'

'You would not spare me a bunch?'

'I would give you everything,' said Joanna, vehemently.

'Why?'

'Because I love you, and would want to make you love me.'

'You ought to love the sick, the suffering, and the needy, and be ready to relieve them.'

'They are nothing to me. They can do nothing for me.'

'We are all one family, tied together by common blood, bound by mutual duties, members of one body; and the hand cannot say to the foot, "I have no need of you," nor the head to the hand, "I have no need of you."'

'We are individuals,' answered Joanna. 'To look out for self is the law of life and of progress. I have heard Laz—I mean my late master—say that this it is which makes the United States so great and prosperous, that every man lives as an unit, cares nothing for his fellows, and beats his way through and over all who stand in his path. This it is which makes the old order fail, that every man under it was entangled in responsibilities to every man around him, above, below, and on his level, and was not free. The old order must give way to the new. That is what my master said.'

'I do not like your theory, Joanna. It grates with my notions of right and wrong.'

'I daresay not, my lady. You have been reared under the old principle of social life, I under the new. Each man for himself, my master said, is the motto of the coming age, and those who are hampered with the old doctrines of mutual responsibilities must go down.'

'You are a very extraordinary girl.'

'No, my lady, I am not. I am merely the child of the period, a representative of the coming age; there are thousands and tens of thousands like me, trained in the same school. To us belongs the future.'

Lady Grace Eveleigh sighed, and put her hand to her brow, unconsciously. 'I have no doubt you are right,' she said; 'I feel rather than see that it is so. Yes—perhaps it is well. I do not know. I suppose I am prejudiced. I like the old order best.'

Joanna was frightened. She had spoken too boldly; not insolently, but confidently. She feared she had hurt her

guide. When Lady Grace put her hand to her brow, it was as though she had received a blow. Joanna touched her.

'Was I rude? Have I pained you? I am very, very sorry. I would die rather than hurt you.' She caught Lady Grace's hand and kissed it.

'No, not a bit,' answered the lady. 'It does one good to know the truth. Sooner or later it must be brought home to us, and rather from your lips than from a ruder tongue. We go on in a dream, with the poor always about and with us, and will wake up with surprise to find them above us. I hear my father and uncles forecasting the future, with dismal faces; I did not expect to hear the same forecast animating the rising power. Do not let us talk of that longer. Let us consider the flowers. By the way, I suppose you will be at our Christmas tenants' ball. We give one in the winter to the farmers and their families, and to the servants and their friends. Of course you will be there.'

'Oh what a pity, what a pity, what a pity!'

Lady Grace was unable to refrain a laugh at the girl's exclamations and droll consternation.

'What is such a pity?' she asked.

'I was to have learned to dance, but my coming here interfered with my lessons, so I can only look on and not be able to take a part.'

'You shall have some lessons,' said Lady Grace Eveleigh, with a sweet, kind smile. 'I will see to that. Miss Worthivale will arrange what times will suit best, and you shall be taught by me, in my own room. Miss Worthivale is so good and sweet that she will help me.'

'Oh, thank you, thank you,' exclaimed Joanna; 'that is prime!'

'There is one thing more,' said the lady; 'as you are fond of flowers, I suppose you must have something like a garden at home.'

'I have five pots—one cracked, and an old teapot without a spout.'

'What grow in them?'

'Fuchsias, Guernsey lilies, geranium, and wild heath.'

'Will you accept this from me? It is nothing to look at now; only a crowd of little horns poking out of the earth; but they will expand in time into lilies of the valley, full of beauty and fragrance. Keep them as a remembrance of me.'

'I will never, never part with them,' said Joanna. 'This

is the second present I have had to-day. Look here! Your brother gave me this.' She showed the porcelain cup and saucer.

'Lord Saltcombe gave you that! What—have you been talking to and astonishing him?'

'Yes,' said the girl, 'I did astonish him a bit. He gave me this; but I like your flowers best.'

'I must leave you now; I saw my father return in the carriage.' Lady Grace hesitated a moment, looked questioningly at Joanna, and then touched her, drew her to her, and pressed a light kiss on her brow. 'We are travellers over one pass. Some ascend as others go down; as they meet and pass, they salute,' she said, and slipped away.

CHAPTER XIX.

SLEEPY HOLLOW.

The Venerable the Archdeacon of Wellington, Bachelor of Divinity, Canon of Glastonbury, Rector of Sleepy Hollow, and Chaplain to his Grace the Duke of Kingsbridge, was sitting in his study with his wife one morning in November, discussing the list of poor people to whom Christmas benefactions were to be given.

The Archdeacon regarded himself, and was regarded, as a man of business. He was secretary to several diocesan societies; he was a stay to the Kingsbridge family. Whenever a spasm recurred in the financial condition of the Eveleighs, a telegram summoned him to South Devon, and he spent some hours in consultation with the steward at Court Royal. When he returned to Somersetshire he felt that his presence had been of use. So it had on more occasions than one, for he had advanced money to relieve the strain.

'Really,' said Lady Elizabeth Eveleigh—the Venerable the Archdeaconess, and Grey Mare of Sleepy Hollow—'I think we do a great deal more than is necessary. There are the coal club, and the clothing club, and the blanket club, and the shoe club, and the Sunday school club, and the widows' alms, and the three yards of flannel to every married woman in the place, and the Christmas largess and the Christmas beef.

This comes very heavy. You cannot put our charities at a less figure than sixty pounds per annum ; then that great imposture, Queen Anne's Bounty, absorbs sixty pounds more, and the rates come to eighty, and the curate gets one hundred and twenty-five. Church expenses amount to ten pounds ; the living is worth three hundred and forty pounds—that leaves us just five pounds on which to keep house, pay five servants, and entertain all the neighbourhood, subscribe to every church restoration, and contribute to every bazaar.'

'My dear Elizabeth, I have my canonry.'

'Worth eight hundred pounds, which goes into that Goodwin Sand, the Kingsbridge debt. I know it does. Do not pull a face ; I know it. I never finger the money.'

'Then there is my archdeaconry, worth two hundred.'

'Out of which we pay the servants and keep the carriage. Edward, it is really too bad ; you ought to have been a Bishop.'

'Elizabeth, how is that possible, with the Liberals in power?'

'I am sure that ought to be no hindrance to your promotion. You have never offered an opinion decidedly on any topic, political or ecclesiastical, that could be objected to by anyone. You have been most tolerant. Your charities have been given indiscriminately to Dissenters and Church people. You never have taken a side. You have been scrupulously *via media*.'

'I do not want to be a Bishop. I have not the physical strength.'

'I do. A bishopric means a good deal more than the four thousand set down in "Whitaker"—it means getting a haul out of Queen Anne, and some pickings, may be, from the Ecclesiastical Commissioners.'

'Let us return to the lists, Elizabeth. We are considering Betty Perkins, not me.'

'Betty Perkins puts me out of patience,' said the Venerable the Grey Mare. 'She has only just paid into the clubs one lump sum. I cannot see the good of clubs and rules, if she is to be allowed to reap the benefit of the former whilst violating the latter. She has sent in four-and-fourpence for the coal club, four-and-fourpence for the clothing club, four-and-fourpence for the shoe club, four-and-fourpence for the blanket club, and twenty-one shillings and eightpence for her five children, who only attend Sunday school now and then—

just before the treat and the Christmas tree. I have her money in my pocket now—listen how it rattles—thirty-nine shillings in all. She will get her cards with seventy-eight shillings on them, just thirty-nine shillings allowed her for putting in her money to-day, to receive it out with interest to-morrow. It is preposterous. I believe she borrowed the sum for the occasion. I refuse to be treasurer and secretary to the charitable clubs if you wink at such flagrant cases.'

'My dear Elizabeth, there is no one else in the parish capable of managing the clubs. As to Betty Perkins, consider how poor she is, with a husband given to drink, and five children.'

'Rules are rules,' said Lady Elizabeth.

'Yes, my dear, but justice must be tempered with mercy.'

'I do not think the clubs and alms do good. The people take what is given them as a right. They are not grateful; they do not come to church a bit the better for being bribed at the rate of five pounds per house to come.'

'We cannot give up the clubs, Elizabeth. They really are a great comfort to the people.'

'You pauperise them, Edward. Well?' to the man-servant who appeared at the door; 'what is it, Thomas?'

'Please, my lady, there is a gentleman in the drawing-room who wants to see his lordship.'

'Let me look at the card,' said the Archdeaconess. 'Rigsby! Rigsby—I do not know the name. Some traveller for a wine merchant, I suppose.'

'Bless me!' exclaimed Lord Edward Eveleigh, when, by his wife's kind permission, he was allowed to look at the card; 'my old college friend Rigsby. I thought he was in Ceylon, coffee-growing. I heard he had realised a great fortune. Excuse me, my dear Elizabeth. Settle Betty Perkins as you like—that is, no, let her off this time, and I will have a talk with her. She will be more regular next year. Elizabeth, I must ask Rigsby to lunch.'

'There is cold mutton and mince,' answered Lady Elizabeth. 'Also tapioca pudding.'

'I haven't seen Rigsby for forty years—no, not for forty years. I must insist on his paying us a visit. You can manage it, Elizabeth?'

'The sheets in the best bedroom are aired.'

The Archdeacon hastened into the parlour, where he found a tall brown man, with grey hair, seated, awaiting him.

'I am so glad—so delighted to see you again,' said Lord Edward, extending both hands.

'I have come,' said Mr. Rigsby, 'on my daughter's account. We have been visiting Glastonbury, and she has been taken ill there, whether with neuralgia or toothache it is not for me to determine. She is a sad sufferer—and I thought, being in a strange place, that I might venture on calling, trusting you might not have quite forgotten me——'

'My dear Rigsby——' interrupted the Archdeacon, with overflowing cordiality.

'Excuse me,' said the visitor, putting up his hand to stop him, 'I will say what I desire first, and then shall be thankful for your remarks on it. I was observing that I relied on your kindness, which I well remembered, to help me with your advice. I am a stranger in Glastonbury, indeed a stranger in England. You have a local dentist here—that is, at Glastonbury. I want to know——'

'Vigurs is the man for you,' said Lord Edward.

'One moment, and I have done,' continued Mr. Rigsby, looking with impatience at the Archdeacon. 'I have no confidence, myself, in local practitioners; if there be real genius it will unquestionably gravitate to town, and the dregs of the profession be left in the country.'

'I beg your pardon——'

'You will allow me to finish what I was saying.' Rigsby looked Lord Edward down. 'One hears atrocious stories of the misdeeds of these men—breaking jaws, drawing the wrong teeth, and so on. I could not suffer Dulcina to run such a risk unless I were perfectly satisfied that the man was really first-rate.'

'Vigurs is a splendid fellow; a thorough Churchman, and always stays——'

'Excuse me if I say that this is neither here nor there. I do not care a snap for the religion and politics of Mr. Vigurs, but I do care for his being a first-class dentist. It is a long way to town, and Dulcina's sufferings are so intense that I am inclined to place my sweet child in the hands of a man, even if in the country, if he may be trusted. I suppose that in Bath or in Bristol a dentist of some experience and intelligence——'

'I can assure you——'

'I shall have done directly. I was observing, when interrupted, that in Bath or Bristol a dentist of experience may be

found, but that would entail a journey to Bath or Bristol. Dulcina, poor child, is so prostrated by her pains last night that I hardly like to move her so far. If you saw the sweet flower, you would say the same—so fragile, so fair, so languishing.'

'You may rely on Vigurs,' said the Archdeacon. 'He has drawn many of my teeth and stopped others. Vigurs is quite a first-rate man.'

'If the tooth be drawn, ether or nitrous oxide must be used. Can I trust this man to employ such means? My child's life is too precious to be played with. She is my only child, heiress to all the fortune I have toiled for forty years to gain. She will be worth ten thousand a year after I am gone. Judge if the world can do without one so gifted. As for me, I live only for Dulcina. Were she to expire under nitrous oxide I should blow out my brains.'

'Have perfect confidence in Vigurs. He is a man of note. This neighbourhood is well peopled with county families, and they all go to Vigurs in preference to London dentists. Where is your daughter now?'

'She is at the White Hart. Miss Stokes, her aunt, is with her. She has administered soothing drops, and Dulcina is asleep. Poor soul, she needs repose after the torture of toothache or neuralgia. I do not pretend to determine which it is, but she has a carious molar. I have seen it. You are positive that Mr. Vigurs may be allowed to look at my daughter's jaw?'

'Positive. First-rate man, gentle as a lamb with ladies. Now Rigsby, as your daughter is asleep, spare me a few minutes to tell me something about yourself. You look well burnt like a coffee-berry, but hearty—more so than myself, who am but a creaking gate. Have you definitely left Ceylon?'

'Yes; Dulcina and I came here to look at a house and park that is for sale. Dulcina and I intend to settle in the country. I have sold my estates in Ceylon, providentially before the coffee disease invaded the island, so that I sold them well, and the purchaser, not I, has been ruined, for which I cannot be too thankful. We like this county, and this part of the country. It is rich, well wooded, and there seem to be many gentlemen's seats about. I cannot say that Shotley Park is quite to our taste, but we will think over it, and discuss it together when Dulcina's tooth ceases to distract her. Poor dear, she can give her attention to nothing now but her tooth and the nerve that runs up into the head across the cheek from the jaw.'

'Will you take anything?'

'I should not object to a glass of sherry and a biscuit. Nervousness about my daughter has rather shaken me.'

'Now look here, Rigsby. I will not hear of your staying at the White Hart. You must positively come to my house and stay a fortnight. Under that time I will not let you off; stay over it as long as you like.'

'Thank you. I do not mind if I accept. If anything has to be done to my dear Dulcina's jaw, it would be more satisfactory to be in your Rectory than in an inn. One cannot secure all the comforts requisite for an invalid at an hotel. Should the tooth be extracted or the nerve destroyed, my daughter will be so shattered that further travel will be impossible for some days. The people at the White Hart are good and kind; still an inn is not a place for a person with a carious tooth. Dulcina is made uncomfortable by the scream of the engines. Glastonbury is a terminus, and every engine that comes in shrieks to announce its arrival, and every one that leaves shrieks to proclaim its departure. Dulcina's nerves are in that quivering state of irritation that the least noise upsets her.'

'She shall come here at once. I will send my carriage.'

'We will come in the afternoon. I must go and see the dentist myself. I shall be able to judge by his looks whether he is intelligent—as for his experience, of that I cannot form an opinion. Has he studied in America? The Yankees are far ahead of us in dentistry. They transplant teeth as we do trees.'

'Wait a moment,' said the Archdeacon; 'I will fetch Lady Elizabeth.'

He ran out of the room, and found his wife still engaged over the club accounts.

'My dear Edward,' said she, 'I will meet your wishes halfway; I can do no more. Betty Perkins shall have two-and-twopence instead of four-and fourpence in each club.'

'Elizabeth,' exclaimed the Archdeacon, 'come into the drawing-room and see Rigsby. But stay—first give me the telegraph forms; I must send off at once for Saltcombe.'

'Why so? What has occurred?'

'My dear Elizabeth, Rigsby has an only daughter, worth ten thousand a year. That represents about two hundred and fifty to three hundred thousand pounds. Oh, Elizabeth, if only some of the Kingsbridge estates might be cleared with this sum, how happy we should all be!'

CHAPTER XX.

DULCINA.

In the afternoon Lord and Lady Edward Eveleigh called on the Rigsbys. The Archdeaconess was full of civility. She was a pleasant, fine-looking woman, with grey hair, and very clear eyes. She spoke in a decided manner. She had ruled her house, her husband—almost the Archdeaconry—for many years. She had ruled society—at least clerical society—for a wide radius. This had given decision to her character and a determination to be obeyed which few were strong enough to stand against.

Miss Rigsby was seated on a sofa. She had expected the visit, and was prepared for it. She wore a crude blue shawl thrown over her shoulders, and a mauve handkerchief was tied round her aching jaws. She had bracelets on both arms, and her fingers were encrusted with rings. She was a pale, freckled young lady, not ugly, and not pretty, with very light eyebrows, and hair thick and coarse. She was proud of her red hair, and had it frizzed into a mass. Her grey eyes were dull, but the pain she had endured had perhaps quenched their light.

'I am going to carry you off to the Rectory,' said Lady Elizabeth. 'It is of no use your protesting. What I have made up my mind to I carry out, as the diocese well knows. I restored Sleepy Hollow church myself. I said to the Archdeacon, "It must be done," and as he would not put his shoulder to the wheel, I begged, got up a bazaar, and did it. I am going to make much of you. You want the quiet and comfort of an English home. We'll soon set you on your feet again, and screw up the relaxed nerves. I know exactly what you want.'

Mr. Rigsby looked entreatingly at his daughter. He had made up his mind to spend a fortnight at Sleepy Hollow, but he did not dare to accept the invitation without the consent of his spoiled child.

Dulcina answered, in a condescending tone, 'I am afraid we shall be in your way.'

'Not at all, or I would not have asked you.'

Mr. Rigsby brightened. His daughter was yielding.

'The invitation is kind,' said Dulcina, 'and if I did not fear trespassing on your goodness I should like to accept.'

'Then accept,' said Lady Elizabeth. 'There—the matter is concluded. I gave orders for the rooms to be got ready before I left the Rectory.'

'You are perhaps expecting visitors?'

'Only Lord Saltcombe—he could be stowed anywhere if we were hard put to, but we are not. Our predecessor at Sleepy Hollow had fourteen children, and added to the Rectory to accommodate them. We have no family, and so there are any number of spare rooms.'

'I am not in a visiting condition,' protested Miss Rigsby; 'my nerves are shaken; I have suffered a great deal.'

'We will put you to rights,' said Lady Elizabeth; 'I understand all that is needed. I doctor the parish—I may almost say I feed it; my opinion is that most maladies proceed from overfeeding or underfeeding. With the poor it is over and underfeeding simultaneously; they overfeed themselves with heavy, lumpy pastry without much nutriment in it, that weighs like lead in them, and they underfeed themselves by not taking good blood and tissue-making diet. You understand me?'

'I think so,' answered Miss Rigsby, listlessly. The poor interested her little or nothing—she occupied her own entire horizon. 'But I,' she said, 'eat neither what is lumpy, nor what is insufficient.'

'My dear,' said the Archdeaconess, 'here in an inn you cannot have the requisite comforts. There is no house in the world like an English house for a person who is sick or convalescent. So it is settled that you come.'

'I really am not up to meeting strangers and making conversation,' said Dulcina.

'Strangers! Oh, Saltcombe! He is my nephew; a nice young man, very agreeable. He will talk, and I can always talk. Besides, Miss Rigsby, if you are going to buy Shotley and settle among us, we must introduce you to the neighbours, when you are well.'

'I do not think papa has settled about Shotley yet.'

'I'll go over the place with him. I will manage everything. I know the quality of the soil on which it is built, the nature of the drainage, and the water supply. I can tell you all the advantages and disadvantages of the place, and I should wish to have a word about the price. I do not choose to have

you taken in and pay a fancy price. There is not a glut of country-houses in the market. Leave it to me.'

'Lady Elizabeth is a most knowing and business-like person, you will find,' said the Archdeacon. 'Dear young lady, be persuaded, and spend at least a fortnight with us.'

'Besides,' said the Venerable the Archdeaconess, 'I should like to have Vigurs under my eye. You have no conception what a stimulus it gives to activity and genius when I overlook the workmen. Vigurs, the dentist, has a great respect for me. He would take infinite pains over you, if he knew I was watching him. Vigurs is a good man—still, the best need supervision.'

'There's something in that,' said Mr. Rigsby.

'Then, again,' said Lady Elizabeth, 'I am bent on getting my niece, Lady Grace Eveleigh, to us after Christmas, and I am eager that you, Miss Rigsby, should know her, and see, if that could possibly be contrived, the Duke's beautiful place, Court Royal, which I assure you is one of the finest residences in the West of England. The Duke would be so interested to hear from your father all about Indian affairs; his Grace is particularly interested in India, and, of course, also Ceylon. It would be a treat to him to talk them over with your father, and you —you will be enraptured with the beauty and comfort of Court Royal. Leave this to me: I am a manager. I will get Lady Grace to visit us, and she will invite you there. You are sure to get on well together.'

Lady Elizabeth played to her husband's bat, but the Rigsbys did not see her play. Father and daughter were flattered. The invitation was accepted.

As the Archdeacon and his wife drove home in their brougham, Lord Edward said to his better half—

'What do you think of her? She is not ugly.'

'Not pronouncedly ugly, certainly. She is simply uninteresting. I do not think that Saltcombe will care for her.'

'He *must* take her,' said the Archdeacon, agitated, putting his hand on that of his wife, and it shook. 'If he does not, the whole house of Kingsbridge will collapse. My dear Elizabeth, the crash is imminent. I cannot see how it can be averted except by Saltcombe's marriage.'

'But he is so inert. He will not realise the state of affairs.'

'That is true. But I take on myself to make him realise

it, and that excellent young fellow, Beavis Worthivale, who regards him as a brother, will help me.'

Lady Elizabeth shook her head. 'The time is past when men sacrificed themselves for their families. I do not believe that Saltcombe cares sufficiently for his position, and the family dignity, to saddle himself with a wretched, selfish, inane, pasty-faced East Indian, so that he may redeem the family from ruin and give his position a new lease of splendour.'

'I will write to him directly I get home,' said Lord Edward. 'I have sent a premonitory telegram. He is not so dead to duty as to reject a solemn appeal from me.'

So the Archdeacon, on his return, took up his pen and wrote his nephew the following letter :—

'My Dear Saltcombe,—I particularly want you to come here at once. Pack your portmanteau and start as soon as you possibly can after the receipt of this letter. There are reasons which make me desire your presence here. My dear fellow, you must allow an old man like me to give you a word of advice. You are supposed to know that the property of your dear father, which will one day be yours, is so involved as to be almost past recovery. I say almost, not altogether. It depends on you whether a grand family of historic renown shall sink and disappear. I have no family, your uncle Ronald lost his wife and children. You are unmarried. If you die a bachelor the Ducal title goes, the family becomes extinct. You are bound to continue a race which has been illustrious and honourable. I cannot bear to think of dear Court Royal passing into other hands. Now, if you marry, you must marry so as to recover the property from its embarrassments. Such an opportunity presents itself. I will speak to you more fully on this when we meet. I pray you, as an old man, your uncle —one who has your welfare, and that of dear Grace, at heart— do not shrug your shoulders and write to say you cannot come. Come at once. Rouse yourself to the emergencies of the case. Rouse yourself to your duty. An Eveleigh has never hitherto wanted goading to perform a duty ; never—when required— to commit an act of self-sacrifice.

'Till we meet—which will be to-morrow,

'Yours most affectionately,

'Edward Eveleigh.

'P.S.—Elizabeth sends her tenderest love to dear Grace. Kiss her sweet face for me.'

CHAPTER XXI.

HOME-THRUSTS.

The Marquess of Saltcombe sat in his pretty room of gold and peacock blue and green, in an easy-chair, holding a book in his hand, without reading it. On the table was a zither. Every now and then he put the book down and struck a few chords on the instrument, but he could not play a melody through. The zither demands much practice, and Lord Saltcombe could not or would not devote time to mastering the instrument.

At his side was a desk, open. He put his hand into one of the drawers, from which issued a scent of rose-leaves, and drew forth a red miniature case. He touched the spring, with a sigh, and exposed a portrait on ivory. The portrait represented a young and beautiful woman, with large lustrous dark eyes, full of dreamy idealism. The ivory lent the face a pearly whiteness, and gave brilliance to the coral of the lips. The painter had succeeded in giving to the countenance an expression of tender yearning, tinged with melancholy; it was one of those exquisitely expressive faces which is sometimes given by nature to angels, but sometimes also, in irony, to beings with little of heaven in their souls. The picture, as a work of art, was a masterpiece; the original, unless greatly idealised, must have been irresistible. The face combined in it the simplicity of the child and the earnest of an eager mind, the charm of perfect beauty and the promise of a gifted soul, liveliness and pathos blent together.

Lord Saltcombe looked long at the lovely picture, and his brow clouded. Then he closed the morocco case, laid it on his knee in his hand, and looked dreamily before him into space. The past rose before him, full of pleasure and of pain. Presently he sighed, put his hand to his brow, made a motion of again opening the case, refrained from doing so, and replaced it in the drawer of his desk, which he closed and locked.

He was removing the key from the lock, when Beavis came in.

Lord Saltcombe was sufficiently man of the world to have control over his features. Every trace of his late sadness departed, and his face cleared to meet Beavis' eye. No one would

have supposed that, a moment earlier, he had been a prey to the most mournful recollections.

'Well, Beavis,' he exclaimed; 'what has brought you here?'

'Have you seen the paper?'

'No—there can be nothing in it to interest me.'

'Our member is dead.'

'What, Woodley! My father will feel this. Does he know it?'

'I think so. He reads his daily paper. Besides, the telegraph boy was up here last night, and no doubt——'

'O no, that was with a message for me from Uncle Edward. He wants me immediately at Sleepy Hollow.'

'Are you going?'

'I don't know; I may. I have nothing to detain me here.'

'Saltcombe, will you not go into Parliament? Now that Woodley is dead, we must have a new election.'

The Marquess made a gesture of impatience.

'There will be no opposition.'

'I do not see why I should go into the House. I have no opinions. I have not made up my mind on any question that now agitates the political world, and I do not want the trouble of thinking and studying these questions.'

'This is unworthy of you.'

'You shall be our new member.'

'No, I have no ambition that way. You are the proper person to represent our pocket borough of Kingsbridge. Of course you have principles. You have inherited those of the family. You are Conservative.'

'I will open my breast to you, dear Beavis. I know that my father's and uncles' opinions are all right, but then I have no doubt that the opinions of the other side are all equally right. My father's views are exaggerated, and the Radicals are exaggerated in their views, and with Aristotle I hold that in equilibrium is safety.'

'Both cannot be right,' said young Worthivale.

'Yes, they can be, and they are. There are two sides to every question, and he who only sees and becomes hot and vehement on one side is a bigot, narrow-minded and purblind. I am sure that in politics, and in religion, and in ethics—in everything, in fact, much is to be said on each side, quite as much on one side as on the other; so I make up my mind to have no fixed opinions on anything, I shrug my shoulders, and let the world go on and muddle its way from one blunder into

another. There now, Beavis, you have my creed. How can I go into Parliament with such doctrine in my heart?'

'That is not a creed at all; it is the confession of a mind that is too lazy to think.'

'You are very rude.'

'I speak the truth, Saltcombe. You know it.'

Lord Saltcombe laughed. 'Of course you are right, Beavis. It is not pleasant, however, to hear the truth put so plainly. Nevertheless, I maintain that my position is a right one. No man can be a partisan in any cause unless he is ignorant of what is to be said on the opposite side. To be an enthusiast you must be narrow. The man of culture is an all-round man; he sees good everywhere, is tolerant of every form of faith, religious and political, because he believes that no party holds a monopoly of the right. The man of culture, then, must be indifferent to all parties.'

'With your abilities, and your position, it is wicked to waste your life over shooting partridges and pheasants, collecting china, and reading ephemeral literature.'

'Upon my word, Beavis, you are sharp on me.'

'I am plain-spoken, Saltcombe, because you must be roused. You are throwing away life in that most miserable of all follies —killing time.'

Lord Saltcombe was annoyed. He raised his eyebrows, and lit a cigar.

'You are striving to deaden the impulses of your nobler nature, which would force you into active life.'

'Indeed,' said the Marquess, coldly, 'I do not contradict you. You feel strongly, speak over-vehemently, because you know only one side.'

'I know what is right, what your own conscience tells you is right; and I say it at the risk of forfeiting your friendship.'

'You strain the relation between us, Beavis,' said Lord Saltcombe.

Young Worthivale was silent a moment. Lord Saltcombe crossed his legs and leaned back in his chair. He did not look at Beavis, whom he allowed to stand. He was annoyed, and wanted the young man to go. Presently, as Beavis did not move, he said: 'Life is either a blank or a torture chamber. If we act in it, we involve ourselves in annoyances; if we aim at anything, we bring on ourselves disappointment; if we take a part in politics, we are covered with obloquy by our opponents —that is, by the press of the opposite party; if we appear in

society, we are subjected to the insulting inquisitorial eyes of the Society papers ; if we attempt anything in literature, we are cut to pieces by critics who know nothing of the subject to which we have devoted our lives. No, Beavis, a man with self-respect should shut himself up in a walled garden and never leave it, but die there of ennui.'

'And the enthusiasm of youth is given us only to drive us to disenchantment and disbelief.'

'That is all.'

'You look on life, really, from this point of view?'

'Yes, ever since my disenchantment. Let me alone, Beavis. It may be pleasure to you to anatomise me, but I have no desire to be the subject of your vivisection.'

'It is no pleasure to me to vivisect you,' answered Beavis Worthivale. 'I speak strongly because I feel strongly. Here is Kingsbridge vacant, and you are the right person to represent it. I speak out what everyone thinks. The Duke, I am sure, wishes it.'

'I have told you, I am no politician.'

'But, surely, you could master the subjects of debate as well as another. Where there is a will there is a way.'

'Exactly—but I have not the *will*.'

Beavis sighed.

'You are not the only man who has been at me to-day. Look at my uncle Edward's letter, if you like ; it lies on the table.'

Beavis took it up, and read it with growing interest. When he came to the end a slight agitation overcame him.

'What is it?' asked the Marquess, who had been watching him. The young man coloured.

'Oh, Saltcombe,' he said, 'the chance has come at last. You must not delay. Why are you now here smoking and reading a book? Have you told Robert to pack your portmanteau? You must catch the next train.'

'I do not like to be brought up to Glastonbury to have my uncle and aunt show me an heiress, and say, "There, look at her coat, how glossy; her hoofs are sound, so is her wind, and she is worth her weight in money." She knows she is on show. I know I am there to criticise. The situation is detestable. We both look absurd, and the natural result is, we dislike each other, and fly in opposite directions. Besides, I do not want to marry.'

'You must accept Lord Edward's invitation. He would

not write so pressingly unless he had found the right person for you.'

'But I should prefer to find the right person myself.'

'Where? In the walled garden in which, as you say, a man of self-respect immures himself. No woman with self-respect will come over the wall to you; you must go about to see women.'

'I do not want to see any, much less to have one hang herself round my neck. The more she is weighted with gold the more burdensome she will be to me. Besides, here I have the society of the best and sweetest women that ever bloomed outside Paradise, Grace and Lucy; they have spoiled me for others.'

'You cannot decline Lord Edward's invitation. It is too urgent to be neglected, couched in too tender a tone to be denied. You must go.'

'I shall return as I go. I want rest; to be left alone.'

'You cannot be left alone. Go out of the world if you want rest. You are building yourself, like a child, a sand castle against the advancing tide; the waves will sweep your walls away and overwhelm you. You desire the impossible. As your uncle says, you have duties to perform, and you will not be the coward to shirk them. You may have to sacrifice much that is dear to you, but every man is made better by self-sacrifice. You are not happy as you are, wasting your days in reading books that do not interest you, following sports that do not amuse you, and collecting cups and saucers that are valueless to you. The books weary you because they are books, and your proper study is life. Your sports fail to distract you because you pursue such poor and wretched game, and the cups and saucers—' Beavis did not finish his sentence; his brow was red, he was excited, angry—his face expressed contempt.

Lord Saltcombe did not interrupt him. Beavis went on: 'My father and I devote our lives to your affairs, which are desperate; but we are met at every turn by your inactivity. We cannot save you because you will not put out a finger by which you can be caught. For the sake of your father, your uncles, your sister, throw aside this paralysing indifference and bestir yourself. You must marry, and marry an heiress, such as your uncle has found for you because you would not put your head outside your walled garden to find one for yourself. You—you must save the family. You alone can

do it. Your father—all—look to you, and you take no step *proprio motu*, but have to be driven on with sharp, perhaps cruel, reproaches. Your father does not know the desperate state of your affairs You ought to know, but will not face it, though the books have been shown you. Your uncles know it, but you repel them when they offer you advice. Lady Grace suspects it, but is too gentle to speak what may give pain. There is absolutely no hope of salvation anywhere else, except in your marriage. If I urged you into political life, it was in the expectation of your being thrown in the way of choosing for yourself. If you stood alone, I would say, sacrifice the estate, sell Court Royal, and begin life on straitened means, working hard, and working your way upward. Seek a regeneration of your family by work. Work makes happy. But you are not alone, Saltcombe, and love for your family forces you to make some sacrifice to maintain it in its proper position. You have no choice. Be a man, brace your heart, and face the necessity.'

Lord Saltcombe became deadly pale. He stood up, and looked at Beavis, who spoke with flushed brow and sparkling eye. After a moment's silence he held out his hand and caught that of Beavis.

'My dear fellow,' he said, pressing his hand, and speaking in a choking voice, 'I honour and love you more than ever. I know what it has cost you to speak to me thus. I feel your reproaches. I will not make a promise to—to—' he looked down. 'Beavis, ring the bell for Robert. He shall pack my traps at once, and to-night I shall be at Sleepy Hollow. There, give me Uncle Edward's letter. I will go see my father at once.'

CHAPTER XXII.

A FAMILY COUNCIL.

Mr. Worthivale had summoned Lucy from the Court. Beavis was there. A consultation was to be held on family affairs. The fire was lighted in the drawing-room, and father and son were there awaiting the arrival of Lucy.

'Father,' said Beavis, 'I do not like that new maid you have got.'

'Why not? She is very respectable and respectful.'

'She puzzles me. There is a shrewd look about her face that one does not generally meet with in a slavey.'

'And you dislike her because she is not an unthinking machine?'

'No, father, that is not it. I expressed myself too strongly when I said that I did not like her; I should rather have said that I mistrusted her.'

'Why mistrust her?'

'Because I am continually lighting upon her in the office.'

'What of that? Is not that the most used room in the house? Because it is so much used, and so many people come in there to see one, it requires more sweeping than any other part of the establishment. Besides, I make a litter there with my papers. No other maid has arranged the papers so well before. Joanna puts everything where I can lay my hand on it at once.'

'You leave books and papers about, without locking them up, more than I think wise.'

'My dear Beavis, who is there to read them? Do you suppose a chambermaid cares one farthing for the accounts, and is greedy to know the clauses of a lease? Besides, Joanna cannot read. Here comes Lucy.'

'I suppose she has heard the news,' said Beavis.

'I don't know. Lady Grace would be told it last of all.'

Lucy entered. She did not look herself that morning. Generally bright and smiling, with a brilliant colour in her cheeks, she was on this occasion dispirited and somewhat pale.

'Why, Lucy, what is the matter?' asked her father.

'I have had a headache,' she answered. 'But I am better now. I could not sleep last night.' She brightened with an effort, came to her father and kissed him tenderly.

'How are all at the Court?' asked Mr. Worthivale. (Here be it noted that he asked this question, however often he met his daughter during the day, before he approached affairs of private interest. The health and welfare of *the* family stood before everything.)

'The Duke is not so well this morning,' answered Lucy. 'He has heard news which has excited him, and excitement always upsets his heart.'

'The news is of a joyful nature,' said the steward.

'Yes, I suppose so,' answered Lucy, faintly, and her eyes fell involuntarily before the observant look of her brother.

'Stay a bit,' said the steward; 'I had clean forgotten old Barberry, who is in the kitchen waiting to speak to me. My memory is going, I believe. It was high time for me to recall Beavis to assist me. I shall be back directly.'

Mr. Worthivale left the room.

'You have heard, Lucy,' said Beavis in a low tone.

'Yes, dear, I have heard what I presume you allude to—that the Marquess is engaged.'

'It is both his father's wish and that of his uncles. I urged it strongly on him.'

'I am very glad,' said Lucy; 'I hope she is worthy of him. Grace is startled, and does not know what to make of the tidings. She ought to rejoice, but cannot till she knows the lady.'

Beavis took his sister's head between his hands and kissed her on the forehead. 'What is for the good of the house gives us the greatest happiness,' he said.

She looked him frankly in the eyes and smiled, but there was moisture in her eyes and her lips quivered. She saw that Beavis had read the secret of her heart, which she had never confessed even to herself. She pressed his hand to her bosom. Then Mr. Worthivale came in.

'Tiresome old man!' said the steward. 'Like all the rest, Barberry wants something. The farmer must have a new calves' house, and the cotter a fresh pigsty. No one is content with the accommodation that suited his forefathers. Barberry came here with a box for Joan, which he had brought in his cart from the station, and being here, thought he might as well make a demand on his Grace's pocket. I have said I would look to the linney. He wants to have one for his carrier's cart. I can't see that the Duke is bound to build him one. If a man buys a donkey his Grace must build a shed for it; and if a woman catches a bullfinch the Duke must provide her with a cage. Hark! Good Lord, what is the matter?' He ran to the door and opened it.

'What is that noise? Who is squalling?'

'Please, sir,' said Emily, 'it is only Joanna.'

'Only Joanna! Has she scalded herself? What is the noise about? Send her down to me. Why are you laughing?'

'Yes, sir,' said the maid; 'I'll tell her you want to see her, sir.'

Presently Joanna came down, her face flushed, in great excitement.

'What was that row about?' asked Mr. Worthivale, still in the hall. 'Were you and Emily having romps or tickling each other? Or have you hurt yourself? I care not. I will not have a caterwauling in my house. Why, bless my soul! the Duke or one of their Lordships might have been here, and then—what would have been thought of my house, I should like to know? What made you scream, or laugh, or cry, or whatever was the noise I heard?'

'Please, sir,' said Joanna, half crying, 'it is too bad! I had set my heart on it, and now it is utterly spoiled.'

'What is spoiled?'

'The pink silk.'

'Pink silk! What pink silk?'

'Oh, sir! I had a beautiful pink silk dress, and as there was to be a dance at Court Royal for the tenants and servants, I sent to Plymouth to have it forwarded.'

'Pink silk! What next! *You* come out in pink silk!'

'Lady Grace has been teaching me to dance. Miss Lucy can tell you, sir; she has helped.'

'But—that does not justify pink silk.'

'I can't wear it; it is spoiled,' said Joanna in a doleful voice. 'The Ems Water has run all over it.'

'Ems Water!' gasped Mr. Worthivale. 'What have you to do with Ems Water?'

'Please, sir, the master put in three bottles with the pink silk, because, he said, the change of diet here might have heated my blood, and something cooling and lowering——'

'The master!—What master?—Colonel Delany?'

'No, sir, not Colonel Delany; another master.'

'What, a doctor? I did not know you had been with a doctor.'

'He was not exactly a doctor—but he did bleed people pretty freely.'

'Oh, a surgeon. Right. Only the ignorant call surgeons by the title of doctor.'

'And one of the bottles of Ems Water is broken. I found it broken in the box, and the water has wetted and stained my dear, beautiful dress. I shall never be able to wear it now—never!'

'That is what you cried out about, is it?'

'Yes.'

'Go upstairs, and thank your stars the Ems Water did spoil your pink silk; you would only have made yourself ridiculous had you appeared in it.'

Then Mr. Worthivale returned to the drawing-room. There was no need for him to repeat the story. The door had been left open, and his son and daughter had heard, and were laughing over, Joanna's misadventure.

Joanna went to her room, half in wrath, half in sorrow. She opened the window and dashed from it the two remaining bottles, casting them into a large bank of rhododendrons.

'That is the end of you,' she said. 'Now there are but three left at the Golden Balls. I wonder what will become of them.'

'Sit down,' said Mr. Worthivale. 'I have sent for you, Lucy, and you, Beavis, to meet me here, because a crisis has arrived in the affairs of the Kingsbridge house—because an emergency has arisen which we shall have to meet, and I do not see how it can be met—except in one way.' He paused and looked at his daughter, then at his son. 'I suppose you know that the Marquess is engaged to be married to a young lady of immense fortune, a lady not in his position, a commoner, but of respectable family. Her father belongs to a Norfolk house; he was a younger son, and sought his fortune in Ceylon, coffee-planting. What he sought he found. He has returned to England worth enough to extinguish some of the charges on the Kingsbridge estate. Now we may look to the Ducal House flourishing and putting forth leaves in old style once more. I am glad. I confess I was despondent at one time. But one should not despair. I have learnt a lesson. There is a special Providence which watches over our great and glorious Aristocracy.'

Mr. Worthivale drew a sigh of relief and touched his breast with his right hand, much as though he were crying 'Peccavi, I have sinned, in that for a season my faith in the English Aristocracy was shaken. I have now passed through the trial; my faith is restored to me.'

'There is one thing I must mention,' continued the steward. 'I have called you together, not only to announce to you that a turn in the affairs of the House has been reached, but also to impress on you the fact that a supreme effort is needed to

bring these affairs to a conclusion. Of course the father of the young lady, and the young lady herself, have been invited to Court Royal for Christmas. Their reception must be splendid. It will never do to allow Mr. Rigsby to see that the family is pinched. Now Christmas is one of the most distressing seasons to a well-ordered mind. It means the influx of bills, the demand for boxes, the payment of annuities, and what is due on mortgages and loans of various sorts; add to these the very copious customary charities. I know that, theoretically and theologically, Christmas is all right, and a festival, and a time of rejoicing, but practically it is the contrary, even to those in affluent circumstances. They cannot escape the annoyances if they are not sensible of the suffering caused by Christmas. I am sorry to say that the closing year will find us in a worse predicament than last. I have strained every nerve to meet our liabilities, but have not been as successful as I could have desired—indeed, to be plain, I have been very unsuccessful. Very heavy charges have to be met, and I do not know where to turn to find the money. The older mortgages are held by insurance offices, and I am afraid to fall in arrear to them. The newer mortgages I do not see how I can meet, and find the money that is wanted for current expenditure. Just now the expenses of the house cannot be reduced. The Rigsbys are coming, and we must find a good deal of money for their entertainment; balls and dinner-parties must be given on a large scale. The old gentleman must be impressed with the greatness of the family into which he is to be received. I do not see how we can press payment from the farmers; their sheep have been diseased, and they have lost entire flocks. The Americans have beaten the wheat they grow below the cost of growing. The importation of foreign cattle has reduced the price of home-grown meat. I have sounded the tenants, and they give me no hope of paying arrears. Now all we want is time. The marriage of the Marquess will relieve the pressure, if not remove it altogether. We must manage somehow to tide over the time till that takes place. Lord Ronald very generously placed three thousand pounds at our disposal, but we want at least as much more. We must prevent the evil from coming to a head before the marriage takes place. As I said before, we have only one thing to consider—how to gain time.'

Mr. Worthivale looked at his son, then at his daughter, questioningly, entreatingly.

'I apprehend your meaning,' said Beavis. 'You ask me to sanction what you have already resolved on in your own heart, the sinking our little savings—I mean yours: I have nothing—in the Kingsbridge debt. The money is yours. It is what you have laid by. Do with it what you will. I will not reproach you.'

'It is not that exactly,' said Mr. Worthivale, rubbing his hands nervously together. 'Most providentially, most providentially, I say,' with great emphasis on the word, 'I took my money out of Argentine bonds in time—before they went to zero.'

'Well, father, and then.'

'Then—I looked about for a safe investment, and really, upon my word, I saw none better than a small mortgage on the Charlecombe estate of the Duke's.'

'Very well. It is there. What then do you want?'

'If I had left it in the Argentines,' argued Mr. Worthivale, 'I should have had nothing for it.'

'And have you drawn your interest since?'

'Not of late,' answered the steward. 'There have been other and more pressing demands.'

'Then what do you want us to consent to, father?'

Mr. Worthivale fidgeted with his hands and feet, then, whilst feeling the button of his collar, which he pretended was coming off, he said, shyly, 'There is Lucy's four thousand pounds, left her by her mother.'

'No,' said Beavis sharply; 'they shall not be touched.'

'Beavis,' exclaimed his sister, 'I entreat you, do not deprive me of the pleasure, the pride, of contributing my little share.'

'No,' said her brother hotly, 'I will never consent to this.'

'Then you will deprive me of a great happiness. I have spent my life, so far, at Court Royal, lived on the kindness of the dear people there. They have loved me as if I were of their blood. The Duke makes no distinction between me and his own daughter. Lord Ronald is kindness itself. I would give my heart's blood for Lady Grace. Oh, Beavis! you are cruel. Do you not understand that it is a privilege and a pleasure to do something, to sacrifice something, for those one loves? Let the money go. Who cares?'

'No, Lucy, emphatically no,' said Beavis firmly.

'The money is now in the Consols at three per cent.,' said

Mr. Worthivale. 'Really, Beavis, I think you unreasonable. I can get four-and-a-half for Lucy if I lend it to the Duke—on security of course. There is absolutely no risk. Lord Saltcombe will be married within six months, and at once, if you desire it, the money can be replaced in the funds.'

'It shall not be taken out.'

'Beavis,' said the steward, testily, 'I am not responsible to you. I am trustee of my daughter's money, and she is old enough to know her own mind. I did not wish to do anything without your knowledge, but I am not bound to follow your advice. If I thought there was the smallest doubt about the safety of the money, I would not make this proposal; but I have not a shadow of doubt. All I want is time; with time everything will come right.'

'I protest,' said Beavis.

'Beavis!' exclaimed Lucy, throwing her arms round his neck, and hiding her face on his shoulder, to conceal the tears that were gathering in her eyes; 'Beavis, it goes to my heart to oppose you in anything, but in this I am as resolute as yourself. Father, you have my full consent. Do not listen to my brother. Oh, Beavis! I am ready to do all I can—for dear Lady Grace's sake.'

Then Beavis sighed.

'It is as you will, Lucy. I am powerless to do more than protest. When a great ship founders, it draws down all the vessels round it into the abyss.'

CHAPTER XXIII.

REFLORESCENCE.

Court Royal resumed its old appearance. Invitations were sent round, and the whole of South Devon was thrilled with expectation. There was to be a succession of dinner-parties and a splendid ball, which would be attended by the officers from Plymouth and Exeter, and by all the young ladies of position in the neighbourhood. For some years the Duke had given no great entertainments. His health furnished the excuse; now, in spite of his health, Court Royal was to become the scene of festivities on a large scale.

Not only were the gentry to be entertained, but the tenants were to have a dance as well—the usual Christmas dance, greatly magnified. So all classes were pleased, all looked forward with eagerness to the arrival of the Marquess, which was to be the signal for the commencement of the gaieties.

The secret was well kept. None knew of the engagement except the Worthivales, and their lips were sealed. The Duke and Lord Ronald confided nothing to their acquaintances, and yet it was clear to all that something of importance had occasioned this divergence from the routine of retirement. The servants suspected it, and were eager to make Court Royal as splendid and hospitable as it should be. They spared themselves no pains, and they invited all their friends and friends' most distant acquaintances to partake of the profusion.

The Rigsbys would arrive a few days after the Marquess, from Plymouth, where they had taken a house for the winter. Mr. Rigsby thought Torquay too relaxing, yet the proximity to the sea advisable for his daughter.

Lord and Lady Pomeroy and their daughter, the Earl of Stratton and the Ladies Evelyn and Augusta Burrington, Lord and Lady Dawlish, Sir Henry Hillersdon of Membland and his party, were expected to stay in the Court over the ball. The house was so large, it could contain a regiment. New liveries were ordered for the servants. The paper-hangers, the painters of Kingsbridge were occupied in redecorating several of the rooms. Supplies of every sort were ordered from local grocers, wine-merchants, butchers, fishmongers. The Duke patronised local tradesmen. He disliked co-operative stores. He would rather pay than break a tradition. The carriages were re-lined, new carriages and additional horses purchased. The only person who did not seem to share in the general excitement was Lady Grace. She moved about the house with her usual composure, looked after the flowers, saw that everyone had a sweet and well-assorted bouquet in his room, had a kind word for the servants whom she passed or came on engaged on dusting and polishing, and was interested in the work of the tradesmen, watched them and asked them questions. There was not a person who came within the circle of her influence, and that was everyone to whom she spoke, who would not have sprung into the fire had she desired it.

She was glad that at last her brother was engaged. She had been his close companion for some years, and she felt an ache in her heart that they were now to be parted, but she had

never become her brother's confidant, and she knew that it was well for him to find a sympathetic woman's soul to which he could open his inmost thoughts. Such a woman she trusted Dulcina Rigsby would prove. She was ready to receive her with love because she was Saltcombe's ideal, and his ideal must be perfect.

Lucy was not as much with her as usual. Lucy was a ready, intelligent, active manager; she saw to everything. Mrs. Probus was old and slow. At her father's request, Lucy took on her own shoulders the care of preparing for the visitors and the entertainments. She was pleased to be occupied, she worked restlessly, she was not quiet for one moment in the day. Lady Grace reproached her for doing everything herself, without imposing any task on her.

'Yours will come when the house is full, and you have to entertain,' answered Lucy; 'leave me to make preparations.'

Lucy was the inseparable companion of Lady Grace, her right hand; she loved her with an adoring devotion, received all her thoughts, and devoted herself to ward off all unpleasantnesses from her friend.

Lady Grace was in the room prepared for Miss Rigsby, adjoining which was another for her aunt, Miss Stokes. She was arranging the flowers on the dressing-table, some white jessamine and pink geranium, and a spray of maidenhair fern. She only touched them with the points of her taper fingers, and they fell into place.

'Do you know, dearest,' she said to Lucy, 'I believe that this engagement will make me perfectly happy. It has been a trouble to me that Saltcombe has been here so long without pursuits, squandering his life and his brilliant talents. I have never understood him, though he has stood nearer to me than anyone else. He is melancholy, as though lamenting something, but he has nothing to regret; or as longing for something, but he has made no effort to attain what he longs for. Which is it? That has been a puzzle to me, and it has distressed me to be unable to unriddle it. Now he has found some one after his own heart, and now real life will open to him. He will put forth his energies, he will wake out of a dream, and we shall find that he will make for himself a place in the history of the present time. All our ancestors have been men of note, though one or two noted only as spendthrifts; yet all have taken some part in politics, or as patrons of literature or art, and I cannot believe my brother will be

content to reckon as a cipher. He seems to me to be one who has either been wrecked when first starting, or as one who has never yet started on the great voyage of adventure—which is life. He cannot have undergone shipwreck—that is impossible, or I should have heard of his disaster ; now he is about to start. He has been waiting for the precious lading to fill the empty hold of his heart. Now that is in, the anchor will be weighed, the pennant run to mast-top, the white sails be spread ; and with a cheer from all of us who stand on the shore, the gallant vessel will start.'

'I believe you are right, Grace,' said Lucy.

'I do long so to see my future sister-in-law ; my heart yearns to love her. Do not be jealous, darling, nothing will ever make me love another as I love you. No one can ever be to me the sweet, strong, enduring friend—the sister that you have been. Do you know, I have been teasing Uncle Ronald about Dulcina. I don't like the name, do you ? He has seen her. When he heard they were at Plymouth, he went down to call on them in Saltcombe's yacht. I have asked him a thousand questions about her, but I cannot get much out of the General. Men are so funny ; they have no descriptive faculty. All he can say is that she is amiable. Well, amiable is one of those unpleasant words which mean nothing—worse than nothing. When you don't want to say an unkind thing about persons, and you know no good of them, you describe them as *amiable*. I am sure Uncle Ronald does not mean that. It is only his clumsy man's way of describing a lady. She has auburn hair and a pale face. I managed to extract that from him, and the father is tall and burnt brown. Uncle Ronald can tell me much more about Mr. Rigsby than he can about Dulcina.'

The Archdeacon and Lady Elizabeth arrived. The excellent curate could be trusted to manage the parish, feed all the fledglings on sop, and the adults on wind. Lord Edward hastened at once to the Duke's room before he went to his own apartments. The Duke was expecting him, excited, but disguising his excitement. For the last hour he had been looking at his watch every five minutes. The brothers greeted each other with great cordiality.

'Have I not managed well?' asked the Archdeacon. 'Who will deny that I am a man of business ?'

'I am much indebted to you, Edward. Without your help we should never have got Saltcombe away from this place. I hope she is a suitable person.'

'She has plenty of money,' answered the Archdeacon, looking down abashed.

'But, Edward! money is a very small consideration. I am sorry he has not chosen one in his own position. Still—if she is a lady, and one likely to make him happy, I shall not object. What attracted him to her? Is she very beautiful? Fair, I understand. I cannot get much out of Ronald; he is either unobservant or reticent.'

'Fair, fair of course,' answered Lord Edward. 'I should not call her exactly a beauty, but then men's tastes differ. I really am no judge of women's faces, I have other things to look at—the Fathers, and the Diocesan Charity accounts.'

'But you can surely tell me something more than Ronald. I should like particulars. Are her manners easy and polished?'

'I should not say exactly polished in the old acceptation of the word. Easy they are, I suppose. She makes herself at home in your house at once, and is rather exacting. But then her father spoils her. She turns him round her finger. It is really a study to see how she manages him. That is good; she will exert herself to direct Saltcombe, and make something of him.'

'I hope so,' said the Duke.

'I am sure of it. I am sanguine that the marriage will be a happy one.'

'I have seen little of Saltcombe since he returned the day before yesterday. He is shy, as you may understand, of speaking on such a topic to me. He always was a reserved man, and now his reserve is intensified.'

'I will go and see him myself,' said Lord Edward. 'I suppose the Rigsbys will be here to-day.'

'I expect them by the next train. They will be here for dinner. We have invited no one for to-day, but every other day of their visit is provided for.'

The Archdeacon hurried to his nephew's apartments. He was a man of business, and before he attended to himself he was determined to have everyone else in order. He found Lord Saltcombe by himself in his sitting-room, pretending to read. He shook him warmly by the hand. 'Saltcombe,' he said, 'remember what is expected of you. I have done all that I can, so has Elizabeth. Upon my word I believe the girl is in love with you, over head and ears. Now, for heaven's sake, do not spoil everything by faintheartedness at the last. Keep your spirits up. Show a good face before your father. There

is a great deal in the girl. It only wants drawing out. Her father has spoiled her, and her natural excellence is a little obscured, that is all. I like her, and think she will make a first-rate wife.' Lord Edward saw everything in rosy light.

A couple of hours later the carriages arrived. Two had been sent to Kingsbridge Road station. Mr. Rigsby, his daughter, and Miss Stokes were in the first, a fine new carriage with splendid appointments ; Miss Rigsby's maid alone in the second with the parcels, and the boxes on the roof. Mr. Rigsby dispensed with a valet.

The evening was fine, the sun cast his last golden rays over the house, and the park looked its best to greet its future mistress.

Lady Grace and Lucy came to the entrance hall ; Lord Edward and the Marquess were there as well, to receive the guests. Dulcina looked about her with surprise and admiration which lent vivacity to her face ; unfortunately the setting sun sent its saffron rays over her ; her complexion was naturally pasty : in the sunlight she looked sallow. Lucy Worthivale stood back, unnoticed, watching Dulcina attentively. Then she hastened to Miss Stokes, and offered to relieve her of some of her wraps.

Dulcina wore a tall hat, boat-shaped, with a great dancing plume in it. She could not have chosen a head-dress less suitable to her style. Colour came into Lady Grace's cheeks for a moment when she met and saw her future sister-in-law for the first time, but not a muscle of her features moved. She greeted her with gentle cordiality that won Dulcina's confidence immediately. The Marquess turned pale when he saw the young lady in her hideous hat, standing in the yellow blaze, looking plain, almost vulgar, but he speedily recovered himself and behaved with courtesy and geniality.

'Upon my word!' exclaimed Mr. Rigsby, looking round, 'what a place you have! Why, you English nobles are princes indeed.'

Mr. Rigsby and his daughter were received by the Duke in the drawing-room ; the audience was very short. Dulcina was carried off almost before the Duke could make out what she was like, and conveyed by Lady Grace and Lucy to her apartments. She looked about her eagerly ; on the stairs, in the corridors ; she said little, she was oppressed by the stateliness and splendour about her, to which she was wholly unaccustomed, brought up in a wooden bungalow in the coffee

plantations of Ceylon, far from society and from settled habitations.

When she had been taken to her rooms the Marquess went to his own. He was followed by Beavis, who had kept in the background. He had observed Miss Rigsby as attentively as had his sister. He was unnoticed, and able to study her unrestrainedly. From his love for Lord Saltcombe, and because he had himself urged him to this engagement, he was eager to judge favourably of Dulcina; but in spite of this prepossession he was unfavourably impressed. It was not merely her complexion and tasteless dress which displeased his critical eye. He thought he saw in her a selfish, querulous spirit, and a lack of womanly tenderness. The geniality of her father, his eagerness to forestall her wishes, to screen her from all vexations, met with no recognition, were accepted as a right, and awoke no gratitude.

When he came into Lord Saltcombe's room he found his friend in the arm-chair by the fire, his head resting in his hand, seeming pale and dispirited. The Marquess looked up, and with a faint smile said, 'Well, old fellow, come to congratulate me? Satisfied with what you have done? Now, tell me, on your honour, your opinion of *ma fiancée*.'

Beavis was confused. He felt some self-reproach. He could not expect that his friend would find happiness at the side of such a dry stick as Dulcina.

'What do you think of her?' asked Lord Saltcombe again.

'I have had only a glimpse. I have not as yet exchanged a word with her.'

'Tell me frankly, are you struck with her?'

'I will speak to you frankly. She is not bad looking at all. We are so accustomed here to see lovely complexions, that one spoilt by the sun of the south seems to us strange. She has a profusion of warm-coloured hair and good teeth.'

'This is not fair, Beavis. You are cataloguing what I am competent to catalogue myself. She has a nose, and eyes, and fingers and feet. The latter small, the ankles good.'

'What do you want?'

'What do you think of her character?'

'Now you are unreasonable with me, Saltcombe. I have seen her for a few moments only, and you demand what you have no right to expect, and what would be unfair to her. I will tell you more after I have had a talk with her.'

'You are evading my question. I want your first impressions.'

'Then you shall have them. I think she has been spoiled. What has been spoiled it will be your place to restore. What lies below the surface, what has been crippled and what stunted by mismanagement, I cannot tell. I never will believe in any woman being other than an angel.'

'Is it possible to make good what is broken?'

'There are crippled hearts as well as crippled limbs. Miss Rigsby is young: kindness and firmness may put the crippled heart to rights; it is only warped by having been allowed to twist as it liked, unrestrained.'

'Thank you, Beavis. You set me a task. You are determined to make me work against my will. I am marrying without love, without regard even, because it is a family necessity. Perhaps the union will turn out well in spite of its being loveless. The French system of *mariage de convenance* is not so bad as novelists would have us suppose, and the love matches these misleaders of youth extol are generally disastrous. Young folks idealise each other, and their marriage is a miserable disenchantment. Where two take each other without any expectation of finding any treasure, every discovery of a good quality, every peaceful pleasure in marriage, comes on them as a surprise, and they are delighted in the end to find each other worth having.'

The Marquess laughed, but constrainedly. Beavis looked at him sadly, sympathetically. He was afraid to speak. He doubted what to say.

Mr. Rigsby gave his key to a manservant, who unpacked his portmanteau for him. He had been accustomed to attend on himself, and was impatient of having this taken from him. He stood with his hands in his pockets, looking on. Then he went to his daughter's room, tapped, and walked in.

'Well, Dullie, what do you think of this? Is not the house magnificent? Did you ever see such livery before, and such a lot of it? Buff and scarlet, red plush breeches—'

'Really, James,' exclaimed Miss Stokes, 'would you—would you be more constrained in tongue before ladies?'

'Lord bless me!' exclaimed the old planter, 'what is wrong? If they wear 'em, mayn't one speak of them?'

'Papa!' cried Dalcina, 'you must observe the decencies of speech, if not before me, before the great folks here.'

'Great folks,' said Mr. Rigsby; 'I believe you, Dullie.

They are great folks indeed ! Tell me, now, is not everything here magnificent ? '

'Oh, all is very nice.'

'Nice ! Superb ! You do not employ proper expressions. You never saw the like in your wildest dreams, because the like is not to be found out of old England.'

'I suppose there are the courts of the native princes in India——'

'Native fiddlesticks ! ' exclaimed Mr. Rigsby.

'Really, really, James,' interposed Miss Stokes, 'would you allow my niece to finish her sentences ? She cannot endure interruptions : you shake her nerves. Moreover, the expression is burlesque and improper.'

'I was only about to remark,' said the abashed Rigsby, 'that Dulcina has seen no native princes. There are none in Ceylon, and she has not been on a visit to Maharajas on the continent.'

'If she has not, she has read of their palaces and heard of their state.'

'They are nothing to the mansions of our nobility. And, Dullie, my dear, the beauty is that you will one day be mistress here. Listen ! Don't it sound well, Dulcina, Duchess of Kingsbridge ? Upon my word, I will have you painted in a ducal coronet and red velvet mantle turned up with ermine. My dear, look round here on everything as your own. The old cock can't last long.'

'What old cock, papa ? '

'I mean the Duke.'

'Really, James, really ! ' exclaimed Miss Stokes.

CHAPTER XXIV.

CAUGHT NAPPING.

NEVER within man's memory had there been such a succession of gaieties at Court Royal as at this Christmas season. The weather was favourable, bright and mild, as is so frequent in these days, when the seasons, as the world of men and manners, are out of joint. The climate of the south coast of Devon, especially of that favoured portion about the Kingsbridge estuary

and the mouths of the Erme, the Avon, and the Yealm, is like that of Penzance. Oranges, myrtles, geraniums grow in the open air, and frosts do not fall sharply on the vegetation in winter.

With an ebbing tide the Marquess took a party down the creek in his yacht to Bolt Head. The sun was brilliant, and under the rocks on the sands the air was so soft and summery that luncheon was spread and taken out of doors. They returned by moonlight. The yacht was illuminated with coloured lanterns; an awning was spread on deck to cut off the falling dews; a band played, and the party danced. The villagers along the shore turned out to watch the glittering vessel as she ran up with the flowing tide, and listen to the strains of music wafted over the water.

Miss Rigsby caught cold on this expedition, and could not appear for a few days. Lord Saltcombe inquired after her health formally two or three times every day, and secretly felt relieved that he was off duty for a while.

When Dulcina reappeared in public her nose was red and glistening—red because it had been much rubbed, glistening because glycerine had been applied to reduce the soreness of the organ. Miss Rigsby's temper had not been at its prime whilst she was unwell, and Miss Stokes' patience and good nature were tried. Dulcina was not even pleased with the Marquess. The trip in the yacht had been planned by him. 'Who ever heard of such nonsense,' she said, 'as a picnic and a dance *al fresco* at Christmas! Did the creature want to kill me? Is he tired of me already?'

'Oh, dearest Dullie,' answered the aunt, 'forgive him. He has become delirious with love. He cannot do enough to please you. He is always inventing some excuse to be with you. If he acted foolishly, forgive; you have driven the wits out of him. I never saw devotion so delicate, and at the same time so passionate, in all my experience.'

'That is not saying much,' snapped Dulcina. 'You haven't had much experience of love, aunt, I will be bound.'

Never was Mr. Rigsby in finer feather than at Court Royal. At dinner he worked the conversation into the groove of coffee-planting, in which he could run for hours. Then, when he had got it on his subject, he poured forth his experience on coffee, and absorbed the entire conversation till coffee itself came in on a silver tray and stopped his mouth. He talked also a good deal on Indian affairs, and pretended intimacy with all

the viceroys, lieutenant-governors, chief commissioners, and British Residents and native princes for the last quarter of a century. He knew the secret history of all that had been done and neglected. He had in his hands the clue to all the tangles, financial and political, of the empire. What might he not expect, when father-in-law to a Marquess, with the influence of a great Duke to back him? Surely, he might aspire to the viceroyalty! He would take nothing less. So he talked long and loud, and made himself a general bore, in the firm belief that he was stamping on the minds of the Duke, the Earl of Stratton, Lord Dawlish, Lord Pomeroy, and all the distinguished guests at the table, that he, Rigsby, was the man England wanted to do in India everything that ought to be done, and to undo every muddle made by every preceding governor. Mr. Rigsby was not a vulgar man, but he was a man without tact; preoccupied with his own ideas, he regarded no one else. This was the secret of his success in life. He had gone forward with the one idea of making money, and he had made it. Now he had got hold of the notion that he was about to make himself a name in Eastern politics, and he therefore talked down and contradicted everyone who attempted to turn the conversation or to dispute his views.

The Marquess played his part in the Comedy of Love with resolution and patience. He was devoted in his attention to Miss Rigsby; he did his utmost to draw out her better qualities. These were few; she had read little, observed little, associated little with superior persons. She regarded her father, though she tyrannised over him. She ruled as a despot over her feeble aunt, a person of inferior culture, and no mind. There was some kindness of heart in her, but most of her thoughts were on herself. Her taste was detestable, uncultivated and originally defective. Here Lady Grace came to the aid of her brother; she ingratiated herself into the confidence of Dulcina, and advised her how to dress; she did so with such delicate adroitness that Miss Rigsby had no idea she was receiving and obeying advice.

Mr. Worthivale was radiant. The cloud that had hung over the house was rolling away; the golden age was returning. His spirits bounded with the hopeful prospects. Not within his memory could Beavis recall a time when he was so extravagantly magnificent in his building of cloud-castles and in throwing golden bridges over Sloughs of Despond. Court Royal was itself again. The old splendour revived; the old

hospitality extended on all sides. Not for one moment did the thought cross the steward's horizon and trouble it, that this revival was due to Lucy's fortune. Nor was his daughter more concerned than he. Generous, self-sacrificing, devoted heart and soul to the family, she was ready to give everything without demanding a return, without grudging if it were lost.

It was other with Beavis. He knew exactly how matters stood. He knew the extent of the peril. He knew whose money paid for all these gaieties and stopped the mouths of the clamorous creditors. For himself he did not care, but for his sister he cared a great deal. A sense of uneasiness that he could not shake off oppressed his spirits. He looked on at the festivities; he partook of them with perception of their hollowness and without enjoying them.

On the evening of the ball he was present, standing in a recessed window, half screened by the blue silk curtains, looking on in a dreamy state—the cloud of apprehension hanging over him—conscious at the moment, however, only of irritation at the dance strains of Strauss, which seemed to his fastidious ear as music full of unclean *double-entendre* unsuitable for such a place and such company.

The ball-room, built by Frederick Augustus, Duke of Kingsbridge, was a noble hall, lighted by two cut-glass lustres of great size. It was painted in panels with pastoral subjects, divided by pilasters of white and gold. The ceiling was of plaster flower-work containing paintings; walls and ceiling were the work of French artists, brought over for the purpose by the art- and splendour-loving Frederick Augustus.

The Duke appeared for a short while, but his delicate condition of health did not permit a long stay. He was surrounded on his appearance by a cluster of ladies, eager for a word and one of his charming speeches full of old-world courtesy and wit.

Beavis did not go to him. For a while, on his appearance, the music ceased, then the doors were flung open, and two Highland pipers entered, one an immense man with sandy hair. They strode up the ball-room to the Duke's chair, stood there a moment playing, then turned sharply and strode down the room still playing, made a second circuit, and disappeared. They were the pipers of a Highland regiment stationed at Exeter.

After this diversion the Duke retired with an apology, and the dancing recommenced with vigour. Then it was, whilst teased by a waltz of Strauss, that Beavis was startled by a

voice at his elbow—a soft, low voice, a voice not to be mistaken. He turned and saw Lady Grace.

'Mr. Beavis,' she said, 'how have I offended you? You have not asked me to dance with you once to-night; but see' —she held out her tablet to him—'I have put you down, unsolicited, for the next quadrille.'

His eye caught a single B on the place indicated. He coloured with pleasure, and looked his gratitude without speaking.

'We have not had a confidential talk together for an age,' she said in her gentle tones, so soft, yet quite distinct; 'and I want it. Dear Lucy has been engaged night and day, and could spare me none of her precious time. Besides, she is reserved with me on the subject of all others that occupies my thoughts. I have no one to speak to but yourself, and I can only speak with you in the midst of a ball. You will be candid with me, will you not? You are a crystal moorstream, and when I look in I see the spars and the sparkling mica, even the grains of black hornblende. Now I want to look in and find what is the gravel over which your clear thoughts run.'

She smiled. The look of her sweet eyes, the dimple on her delicate cheek, the flutter of the throat, the intonation of the voice, were full of pleading.

'Dear Lady Grace,' answered Beavis, 'you know that I am devoted to your service. I can deny you nothing.'

'Then, Mr. Beavis, be frank with me. I know how kind and good you and all your family are. You are too kind, if I may dare say that. I mean that to spare me a moment's pain you would cover up from my eyes all the little black grains. But, I pray you, let me have the very truth. Hide nothing; let me see all I ask to see. Will you not trust me? Am I a coward to turn pale and fly at the sight of a spider? I am stronger than you think. I can bear more than you give me credit for. That which tortures me most of all is uncertainty. You will trust me—do, pray!'

She put her fingers to her fan beseechingly, and looked at him.

'What do you desire to know, Lady Grace?' he asked with restraint. There were things he could not tell her, however suppliantly and sweetly she might plead.

'I cannot understand my brother's engagement. Does he love her? Does he admire her? I have tried my best. I have done all I can to find out what there is admirable in her, and I

cannot like her ; I can only endure her, and that only for a little while. I thought that I knew Herbert so well ; what he likes I like, and what I fancy he fancies ; in that we are almost as tied as twins, but in this one matter I have no sympathy with him. You do not know, Mr. Beavis, how I have striven to regard her as a sister. I cannot ; I cannot do it ! But it is not *that* that troubles me. I would never let her suppose I could not love her, but I am not sure that Herbert loves her. I cannot think they will be happy together. What *is* the attraction in her ? '

She looked round to make sure that she was not overheard.

' I had a battle with myself ; at last I plucked up sufficient courage to approach the subject with him. You know that she has had a bad cold, and has kept her room. During this time I have been able to talk to my brother and walk with him, with my hand through his arm, on the terrace, whilst he smokes, just as before this—this affair. I have crept very near to the question that perplexes me, but he will not allow me to touch it. He glances aside and bids me keep at arm's length. He turns the conversation to indifferent subjects, and then my heart sinks. Only once did I wring anything like an answer from him, and that was " Beavis approves." That was referring me to you, was it not ? That is why I speak now. O prithee tell me the truth ! Why do you approve ?

Beavis looked down. What could he answer ?

' I have not had much conversation with Saltcombe since his engagement,' he answered in a low tone. He blushed as he spoke, for it was an evasion, but he could not help himself.

' Oh, Mr. Beavis ! ' she exclaimed, with pain and discouragement in her expressive voice, ' you are playing with me. I ask for the truth, and you throw up a soap-bubble ! '

' Lady Grace,' he said gravely, ' this is not the place, nor have we now the time, for speaking on this matter. I must, unworthy as I may seem, ask you to do that which I appear unwilling to do to you. I must ask you to trust me. I do approve of Saltcombe's engagement—I may add, I advised it. This latter was a responsibility—a terrible one ; nevertheless, I took it upon me. I did advise this engagement.'

' So did Uncle Edward, I know, and Aunt Elizabeth as well,' said Lady Grace sadly. ' I am treated like a child. I am given no reasons. I can hardly bear it. I am no longer a child ; I am growing into the old woman.'

'Never, never, Lady Grace! with a heart as fresh and a spirit as bright as a May morning.'

She smiled very faintly, almost imperceptibly, slight dimples forming at the corners of her mouth. The tears were very near the surface.

'I must trust you,' she said. Then, thinking she had spoken grudgingly and ungenerously, she looked up and said, 'I trust you frankly, freely, from the bottom of my soul. Excuse my petulance, my curiosity. From the days of Eve woman has wanted to know what she had better not know!'

Beavis was uneasy. He felt that she was hurt by his want of confidence—hurt and disappointed. He knew that this disappointment would cost her tears when alone. He could not do otherwise. He could not tell her that this marriage was *de convenance*, one for money, and money only. Her healthy, pure mind would recoil from such a truth. She would think such a union unholy, dishonouring. But it was necessary. She did not know the bankrupt condition of the family. If told it, she would not realise it. If she did realise it, she would refuse to sanction escape from it by such means. Beavis knew this. He could see into that transparent soul better far than she could look into his.

'The quadrille is forming,' she said; 'let us take our places.'

They did so under one of the great chandeliers.

How beautiful was the scene: the background of old paintings and white and gold, the brilliant light from above, the brightly polished floor of inlaid woods, the figures in gay colours—the turquoise blue, the eschscholtzia yellow, the carnation pink, the lily white—flickering in and out like pieces in a kaleidoscope. The beautiful faces, bright eyes, the various hairs—golden, chestnut brown, black—the flash of diamonds, the flowers—how lovely was the scene! Yet, lovely above every person and every object there, incomparable in every way, Beavis thought Lady Grace—not wrongly, not with any exaggeration. Incomparable she was in white and the palest blue satin, so pale as to be scarcely blue at all, with aquamarine parure, and a cross of the same hanging from her necklet and resting on her pure bosom. The delicate blue veins in her temples and on her throat and bosom showed through her transparent skin. Her eyes were of deep violet blue—the only dark colour about her. In her cheeks was the faintest tinge of rose. Lady Grace, as has been said before, was not a young girl; she was sliding out of youth. But age

as it drew on, added sweetness to her face ; it gave expression where it withdrew bloom.

Miss Rigsby flared by in yellow and red ; the Misses Sheepwash were in the same quadrille, hot with dancing, their cheeks aflame, and their fans working vigorously ; they were bouncing girls.

Beavis turned his eyes away. He looked at his partner, moving easily, without exertion, full of grace in every undulation. It was a delight to the eye to rest on her.

She did not look at Beavis during the dance. When he had the chance he said, 'I have offended you—'

'No, you cannot do that ; only disappointed me.'

'I cannot help myself. I am obliged to say, Trust me. I can do no other. Rely on me that I advise nothing which is not best for your brother and your family ; best attainable, I mean, not ideally best.'

He had to lead her across in the dance. She slightly pressed his hand. It was to say, 'I trust.'

When she returned to his side she said, 'Do me a favour. Poor Miss Stokes is sitting yonder, the picture of woebegonedness. Please me by dancing once with her. You do not know how dreadful the world seems to a young lady who has been a wallflower one whole night. A single round alters the aspect of life.'

In the country there is generally a preponderance of ladies at a ball. It was not so on this occasion at Court Royal. Officers had been invited from Plymouth and Exeter, so that every young lady—except Miss Stokes, who was not young, but refused to consider herself old—found a partner, and every young lady said afterwards that this was the most perfect ball she had ever attended. Even Miss Stokes said it was a nice ball. She danced twice with Beavis. Beavis was not obliged to dance. He preferred looking on. He watched Miss Rigsby, and he saw that she was flattered with the attentions of the Marquess, and that, so far as her cold nature could feel affection, she loved him. Her eyes followed him when he danced with another, with an expression in them much like jealousy. Lucy had been compulsorily relieved of her superintendentship of preparations for, and conduct of the ball, by Lady Elizabeth Eveleigh, who on her arrival took everything upon herself. Lady Elizabeth was full of system, and Lucy was obliged to admit that everything went more smoothly ; the servants became more prompt under the rule of Lady Elizabeth than under

herself. She would have kept in the background in the ball-room had she been allowed, but she who had thought of others was thought of by them. The Marquess insisted on her dancing with him, then Lady Grace introduced officers to her. Lord Ronald would not be refused her hand in the lancers. Lord Edward, the Archdeacon, did not dance, but he drew Lucy into a window and talked with her for half-an-hour in an affectionate manner. Whenever Lady Grace passed her in valse, or quadrille, or cotillon, she smiled, and if possible gave her a kindly word. In spite of her efforts to escape, for she was not in good spirits, Lucy was not allowed to retire. She danced as often as any young girl in the room. Her partners liked her. She was unaffected, full of good sense and modesty. About three o'clock in the morning Beavis told his sister he was going home.

'Papa has the key,' said she. 'Our maid, Emily, is here helping. She and that other, Joanna, could not both come to-morrow, so they arranged between them that one should be here to-night and the other be at the tenants' ball. Papa said she was to go to bed, and that he and you would let yourselves in.'

'I'll get the key,' answered Beavis; 'then I will sit and smoke in the study till our father comes. I do not suppose he will leave yet.'

'Oh dear no! not till the last moment; he enjoys the ball as much as a girl does her first coming out.'

Beavis got the key and walked home.

When he left the house, and was in the park, he turned and looked back at the illuminated mansion; the strains of music came to him faintly through the trees. Then the sense of oppression, which had hung over him all the evening in the glitter of the ball-room, descended heavily on his spirits.

Was it possible that the Marquess would continue in the same resolution and marry Miss Rigsby? If he did not, then the earthquake would follow, and engulf not only the Kingsbridge family, but his own. As yet Lord Saltcombe had shown no token of wavering. He was too honourable a man to shrink from an engagement when once he had passed his word. On this Beavis assured himself that he could rely. As far as he could see the marriage would certainly take place. That which troubled him was not the doubt of its accomplishment, but the probable result afterwards. Was there any prospect of happiness to the Marquess in such an union? There was none—none at all. The characters were incompatible. The marriage

must lead to mutual estrangement. It would end Saltcombe's friendship for Beavis, whom he would always regard as the evil adviser who had brought him into hateful bonds. Beavis opened his house door noiselessly, and as noiselessly entered the hall. He wore goloshes over his patent leather boots, and his steps were soundless on the kamptulicon floorcloth. To his surprise he saw that the office door was ajar, and that there was a light within.

He walked down the passage and entered.

He saw the girl Joanna at his father's writing-desk, seated on the stool asleep, her head reposing on her arm upon the desk. A candle was burning beside her. The book-cupboard or press, in which the ledgers were kept, was unlocked and open. The bunch of his father's keys was there, hanging in the lock. On the desk were some of the ledgers, open.

Beavis stepped up to the girl in great surprise, and saw that under her hand was a small account-book, in which, as far as he could see, without removing her hand, was a series of extracts from the ledger; of particulars of rents, payments, incumbrances, neatly written, not in his father's hand.

'Joanna!' he called, and laid his hand on her shoulder. Instantly she sprang to her feet, looked at him in a bewildered manner, gathering her senses with difficulty, put her hand firmly on the account-book, and with the other knocked the candle over. It was instantly extinguished on the floor.

'What is the meaning of this?' asked Beavis, confronting her in the dark.

'I beg your pardon, sir,' answered the girl; 'I am sorry. I fell asleep whilst sitting up to open when you came home. I thought you might want some hot water and sugar and the whisky. I'm sorry the light has gone out. If you'll please to excuse me a moment, I will fetch a candle from the kitchen.'

She was fumbling with her hands whilst speaking.

'What are you about?' asked Beavis sharply.

'Please, sir, I can't find the candle where it has fallen.'

'Never mind the candle. Go fetch another.'

She slipped away, but not at once, as bidden. Presently she returned, holding a bedroom candle alight. She looked sleepy, her eyes were dull, her hair tangled.

'Joanna,' said Beavis, looking at the desk, 'I must know the meaning of this.'

'I told you I was sitting up,' she answered. 'In the kitchen I might not have heard, and I made so bold as to come in here,

where I'd be sure, I thought, to hear when you were at the front door. I'm sorry I was that bold to do so.'

'What has become of the note-book I saw on the desk a moment ago?'

'What note-book, sir?'

'One I saw beneath your hand as you lay asleep.'

Joanna shrugged her shoulders. 'There are a power of books of all sorts here,' she answered. 'Which would you please to want, sir?'

'I insist on your producing the book.'

'I have none to produce,' she answered, stupidly or doggedly.

'Joanna, how came the cabinet open, and the books about?'

'I suppose the master left them so.'

'And the cabinet unlocked?'

She shrugged her shoulders, then yawned. 'I beg pardon, sir, but I am that sleepy I can neither think nor speak. Do you want some hot water and tumblers, and the sugar, and the whisky?'

'Go along—to bed at once,' said Beavis. 'I'll inquire into this to-morrow.'

'And the whisky, and the sugar, and the hot water?'

'Go along,' said Beavis, stamping. 'I want nothing but an explanation of your conduct, and that I will have from you to-morrow.'

'Yes, sir.' She looked at him. In that quick glance there was neither stupidity nor sleep.

Before he could speak again she had stolen away.

CHAPTER XXV.

WITHOUT WARNING.

Beavis remained up, smoking and musing in the study till his father returned. He did not speak to him about Joanna that night, as the old man looked tired. He gave him his candle, made a joke about a midday breakfast and lunch rolled into one, at which they would meet, and retired to rest.

Neither Beavis nor his father came down till late next morning, and then only, over their breakfast, was Joanna's behaviour discussed.

'I never take tea with meat. What is it this morning? Kidneys? Kidneys above all. No tea, Beavis, coffee for me; less tannin in it. Can you conceive anything more calculated to give dyspepsia than to immerse meat in a fluid charged with tannin? You convert it at one stroke into leather, and make demands on the gastric juice which it is not qualified to perform. No, tea is poison; give me coffee.'

'Certainly, my dear father,' said Beavis with a smile. 'I fear I have something to communicate which will disagree with you more than tea.'

'Then reserve it.'

'I must not. We must act upon it at once.'

Mr. Worthivale sighed. 'I enjoyed myself so greatly last night. Indeed, I do not think I have spent such a happy ten days as these last since I was a boy. Well, what is it?'

Then Beavis told his father what he had seen that morning early on his return from Court Royal. Mr. Worthivale was annoyed. 'One cannot get along a week without unpleasantnesses,' he said peevishly. 'Really, at my time of life I expect relief from worries.'

'Where did you leave your keys?'

'I cannot say for certain. Yes, I can. I am positive: that is, I think I locked everything up as usual, and put the keys in my trousers pocket. I generally—I may say always—do so on principle. But yesterday I was in such a hurry about the ball. My time and thoughts were in such requisition that I may have committed the oversight of leaving them in the bookcase. I was not at the office at all after half-past three, and then I was there for an hour only. There was no money in the drawers.'

'No, but there was information concerning the Duke's affairs worth to some people a good deal of money.'

'It would certainly be annoying if stupid gossip got about concerning the family embarrassments.'

'I do not allude to gossip.'

'I'll tell you what I will do, Beavis. I'll ring for the girl, and then we will examine her together. I see no cause for alarm. She can neither read nor write.'

'Who told you so?'

'A Mrs. Delany, in whose service she was before she came to us. Touch the bell, Beavis.'

In response to the summons Emily appeared.

'Look here,' said the steward; 'send the other girl to me.

I mean Joan or Joanna, whichever she is called, I cannot remember. I want a word with her.'

'Please, sir,' answered Emily, 'she is gone.'

'Gone!' exclaimed father and son in a breath.

'Yes, sir. She went by the first coach this morning, when you were asleep. She said as how the young master had given her notice to be off at once. She took her box out into the road herself. She was in a pretty take on too, sir, because, as she said—to use her very words—she was chiselled out of a dance. She'd set her heart on going to the tenants' ball to-night. Her and I had a regular breeze because we could not both go, and it ended in the usual way. She got her way, and made me go last night just to look on and help. She was crying with vexation because she could not be at the dance. When she went away she said, What would Lady Grace think, who had been so kind to her, and Miss Lucy, who'd taught her to dance!'

'I did not give her notice,' said Beavis in a low tone to his father.

'She has not had her wage,' said the steward aloud to Beavis and Emily.

'Well, now, that is queer,' began the maid, when the young man cut her short with,

'You may go.'

As soon as the girl was gone Beavis said, 'This makes matters more suspicious. I told Joanna that I would examine her with you to-day, and rather than subject herself to interrogation she takes herself off without warning.'

'She forfeits her wages,' said Mr. Worthivale. 'But I dare be bound she misunderstood you. Beavis, you speak rather sharp with servants. I dare say Emily would have talked on for half an hour if you had not cut her over the knuckles so sharp.'

'I have no doubt whatever she would.'

'She might have told us a good deal,' said his father. 'I have no doubt in my mind that a misapprehension lies at the bottom of this unfortunate affair. Of course, Joan had no right to be in the office, but perhaps she was dusting and tidying. You know yourself how neat she keeps that room, which of old was always in a litter. Once I never knew where to lay my hand on anything. I shall miss her; she had her good points. I dare say you snapped off her head when you came in and found the poor creature dozing over her work. No doubt she was tired. You are too hasty, Beavis, too hasty by

far. No question she has left her address with Emily. I will ring and inquire.'

Beavis stayed his father. 'I am sure she has not. This is a more serious matter than you suppose. I never liked the looks of the girl; she was too clever.'

'That comes of education; the over-education of this nineteenth century.'

'But she can neither read nor write.'

'Oh! I beg your pardon. I mean the reverse. She is clever because not overtaxed by Board School masters straining poor, underfed brains to reach standards that are far above their level.'

'Whence did she come?'

'From Plymouth, from Colonel Delany's—a very respectable family. He is connected by marriage with the Pomeroys. I do not know who Mrs. Delany was, but of course she is a lady, and she wrote in highest commendation of the girl.'

'Let me see the letter.'

'It is somewhere in the office; I think I can find it; follow me. But mind, Beavis,' said the steward, stopping at the door, and holding up his finger; remember what I have said about drinking tea with meat. You deliberately tan your food, and yet you expect to digest it. As well eat sole-leather.'

The old man fumbled in his drawers.

'I thought I had put it in this pigeon-hole, among sundries. It seems to have made itself wings and gone.'

'I have little doubt Joanna has taken it.'

'She could not read or write,' said Mr. Worthivale.

'If she does not read, why did she pull out the ledgers? If she does not write, who made a précis of the debts and income of the family in the little note-book I saw?'

'It may have been in my handwriting. I often take odd scraps of paper and figure on them the revenue of the Kingsbridge estates, and the outgoings, and try to extract some comfort from them. I dare say you will find a score of such balances in the wastepaper basket.'

'They ought not to be there.'

'Who is the wiser? I put initials to the debts.'

'What I saw was not in your handwriting, and was done very clearly and systematically. It was done by some one experienced in bookkeeping—that is the only point that shakes my conviction that the girl has bled your books.'

'What was the back of the account-book like?'

'I did not see it. Joanna knocked the candle over, as I am convinced, deliberately, and in the dark secreted the notes and put away the ledgers. I heard her do the latter, and when she returned with the candle, everything was in place, and the account-book nowhere that I could see.'

'We will overhaul the cabinet.'

'I should like to overhaul her room.'

'I will call Emily.'

The maid conducted Beavis upstairs.

He looked round. The bed had not been slept in. Some scraps of paper lay scattered on the floor; a saucer with water in it stood in the window.

'Ah!' said Emily, 'never was nobody so stuck up as Joanna over nothing as she was over the pot of lily of the valley her ladyship gave her. She went off on the top of the coach, hugging it like a baby, and I seed her kiss her hand and wave it, right away over the woods towards Court Royal; and she was crying. I reckon she was sorry to go. She was so taken with Lady Grace, she nigh worshipped the ground she trod on; and the last thing I heard her say was, "Oh, what will Lady Grace think!" Why, sir, I reckon her ladyship won't cast a thought after her.'

Beavis shook his head.

'Joanna has not left a pin that was her own. She looked about the room a score of times to make sure she had everything. She carried away her pink silk as she minded to have worn at the tenants' ball, had it not been spoiled with mineral water.'

'Did she give you her address?'

'No, sir, her and me wasn't over-good friends. She was one that would have all her own way, she was that over-bearing. I did think it was not fair that she should go to the dance to-night and not I, who am the longest in the place, but she was that set on it, I reckon there was no withstanding her. Lady Grace and Miss Lucy had taught her to dance for the purpose—she brought this up on me, and what was I to say?'

'That will do,' said Beavis. 'I asked a simple question and required a simple answer.'

'And after all, sir,' said the unabashed Emily, 'she won't go to the ball neither. That's sweet comfort.'

The tenants' ball began at seven, and by tacit understanding was to be over at two in the morning. The hours were

very much earlier than at the grand ball of the evening before. Mr. Worthivale and Beavis were there, as a matter of course, and all the Ducal family appeared. His Grace remained in the ball-room longer than on the former occasion, talking to the young farmers' sons and daughters, showing that he knew them all by name, took an interest in their welfare, and was delighted to have them about him enjoying themselves. He was obstinate on this evening, he would not go when his daughter thought advisable.

'No, dear,' he said, 'it refreshes me to see all their happy faces. How hearty they are; how well they behave; they are so courteous and kindly! I do like our English peasantry; there is a gentility of feeling about them I meet with nowhere else—good hearts and clear heads.'

The Duke knew nearly everyone. He had the happy faculty of never forgetting a face, and of remembering the circumstances of every family. He had the tact of enquiring after absent members, by name, with such real or well-simulated interest, as to gratify those he addressed, and convince them of his sincerity and friendship.

'What! Mrs. Prowse! You here? This is an unexpected pleasure. How many years ago was it that you were pretty Mary Eastlake, with whom I opened the ball? The belle of Aveton Gifford.'

'Well, your Grace, my daughter has come for her first dance, and as I've no other children—you'll excuse me, your Grace—I thought I'd come with her and see her safe home.'

'Bring her to me. If she is like you in old days, she will kill many hearts this evening.'

'Well, Richard Palmer! I hope you have brought your voice and will favour us with a song, when the dancers give over for a moment. How is poor Jane? Is she still suffering from her spine? I was so grieved to hear of her accident—I had counted on her presence this evening.'

'How are you, Mr. Newberry? Last time I saw you, your wife was bent on the great ash being cut down in front of the gate. It went to my heart to deny her, the tree was so fine, but I learnt a lesson; the gale of last October tore the tree to pieces and pelted your roof with the boughs.'

'Broke the roof through and through, your Grace.'

'That is a lesson never to deny the ladies anything; I dare say your own experience teaches you the same.'

'How do you do, Mr. Nesbitt?' to a schoolmaster; 'glad

I secured your services for the new school at Wooley. I read your account of your misadventures—that you sent to *Blackwood*—with great amusement. Never laughed so much in my life. It was smartly written—very. You will do something with your pen some day.'

'Oh, Lucy, dear,' said Lady Grace, 'do go to papa and persuade him to retire. He is so happy when he gets with the young people that he will stay on here longer than is judicious. He will suffer for it to-morrow, and I am sure that they will dance with more ease when the restraint of his presence is removed. Look! there are only three circling round the room now, to the strains of the whole marine band, and they are blushing and disposed to give it up. Where is Joanna? What has become of that odd girl? I see her nowhere.'

'I do not know; I will ask my father, or Beavis.'

'Do, Lucy, go to the Duke. He will listen to you when he will not obey me or Uncle Ronald—not even the Archdeacon. You have such a coaxing way, and yet you are so resolute, he will not refuse to go. Dear old man! it is always "Where is Lucy?" with him. Nothing goes right unless under your hands.'

Then Lady Grace caught the eye of Beavis, and beckoned him to her. 'Where is your maid Joanna?' she asked. 'Do see how shy the young folk are. These couples are only dancing because I have set them spinning, and they do it out of duty, not because they enjoy themselves. Joanna has no shyness, I will get her a partner and set her off.'

'She is not here, Lady Grace.'

'Not here! But how is this? Could you not spare her? I am sorry; Lucy and I have been teaching her to dance, and she had so set her heart on this evening.'

'She is a perplexing, queer girl.'

'She is a girl worth studying, a girl from whom a great deal may be learnt; delightfully fresh and yet terribly worn out, if you can understand such a compound of opposites. Is not that the sum of Hegel's philosophy, the conciliation of antagonisms? Well, that is Joanna. I am so sorry she is not here. I should have delighted to see how she profited by my teaching.'

'She is gone, Lady Grace.'

'Gone!'

'Yes, gone without warning.'

CHAPTER XXVI.

UNSTABLE AS WATER.

THREE days after the grand ball the Rigsbys left. Miss Rigsby had not appeared at the tenants' ball; she was tired, and did not feel well. The rumour of the projected marriage had got about, and the tenants would have liked to have seen their future Duchess, but she was ungracious; she disliked vulgar people and would not appear, to the disappointment of the tenants and of the Duke, who thought that, in this matter, she did not act with the consideration proper to her position.

The Marquess and she had seen a good deal of each other, and everything seemed favourable to a marriage. Mr. Rigsby held long conferences with the Duke, and came away greatly impressed with his urbanity, and still more impressed with the conviction that he had made his own wisdom and importance clear to the Duke. Miss Rigsby had convinced herself that she was in love with the Marquess. Miss Stokes assured her of the passion that consumed the bosom of her lover. Lord Saltcombe did not in any way vary in his behaviour; always courteous and considerate, ready to be with her on every occasion, conversing on her reminiscences of Ceylon, and attracting her attention to what was interesting in the country that was shortly to be her home. She had no appreciation of what was good in art, and he amused himself and her in endeavouring to instil into her some of the first principles of taste.

The day after the departure of the Rigsbys Beavis went to his friend's rooms. He found the Marquess in his arm-chair among a heap of papers that he had torn up and cast about him on the floor. He was so deep in his thoughts, which were of a painful nature, that he did not notice the entrance of Beavis. At his first word he started and sprang up bewildered, unable at once to recognise the speaker.

'You are, I hear, going to Plymouth, Saltcombe?'

'I—Plymouth!—oh yes, I forgot. To be sure, yes, Beavis, I am going there for a while. How hot it is in the room!'

The Marquess went to the window and threw it open, drew a long breath, passed his red silk handkerchief over his brow, and then returning to his chair, said, 'Oh, Beavis! you

have no conception of the strain on one's powers to keep up the appearance of being a lover.'

'Good heavens!' exclaimed Beavis; 'speak lower, or say nothing on the matter.'

'I must speak. I have no one but yourself to whom I can give vent to my feelings. This is your doing; you have put me on the rack.'

'I have advised for the best.'

'I know you have,' answered the Marquess with a bitter laugh. 'I will go through with it now, my honour is engaged, so do not fear. *Tout est pour le mieux dans le meilleur des mondes.* You must excuse me if, at times, my courage gives way.'

Beavis had never before seen Lord Saltcombe so excited. He was usually composed and cool.

'The Duke wants a word with you,' said Beavis. 'I have come to tell you that he wishes to speak to you in the rose boudoir.'

The Marquess nodded. 'One moment, Beavis, before I go.'

'I am at your service.'

'Tell me, how is it that we are spending money right and left just now, and that there is not the ever-recurring worry of a deficit?'

Beavis hesitated.

'I insist on knowing,' said Lord Saltcombe.

'The necessary sums have been lent.'

'What! a fresh loan to crush us! At what rate of interest now? Who is the lender? Another Jew?'

'No Jew,' answered Beavis. 'No interest is asked, as all will be repaid as soon as your marriage takes place.'

'Who is the Good Samaritan that has flown to the rescue?'

'There is nothing of the Good Samaritan in this. It is but a temporary accommodation.'

'But who is this most accommodating party?'

'My father.'

The Marquess stood still and looked at Beavis. He put his hand to his chin; it shook. 'Good God!' he exclaimed. 'You—you dear good friends! You again helping us!' He was greatly moved. He took Beavis' hand and held it tightly in his whilst he looked out of the window. 'Oh, Beavis! how kind, how noble you are! I insist on the whole truth. What is the sum advanced?'

'Four thousand.'

'Is that your father's money?'

'No.'

'Whose is it then?'

Beavis did not reply. He looked down.

'I insist on being told.'

'Lucy's.'

'What!' exclaimed the Marquess, colouring; 'indebted to dear Lucy more deeply still. Oh, Beavis, never, never, can we repay the debt we owe your house. So Lucy finds the money to wreath the ox for the sacrifice.' He was silent, he let go his friend's hand and stood before the fire, looking down and kicking the hearth. 'It shall all be repaid,' he said at last; 'I mean the money. The good intent, the self-sacrifice, that can only be treasured in our hearts, a priceless possession. Beavis, do not fear. The marriage will take place, and that speedily. I cannot bear to be indebted so deeply to you.'

'Your father is awaiting you,' said Beavis, anxious to cut short a scene painful to both.

The Marquess left the room, and sought his father.

The Duke led a very regular life, regulated to the smallest details. He suffered from sleeplessness, and therefore did not rise till late. He breakfasted at half-past ten, after which he was visited by his son and daughter, and occasionally by Lord Ronald. The General was up at half-past six, and took a constitutional till eight, when he came in and had a cup of coffee. He breakfasted with the rest at nine. The Duke read his letters whilst dressing, and arranged them in three piles; those he must himself reply to, those that might be answered by his daughter or son, and those on business, which he passed over to the steward. Mr. Worthivale called daily—or almost daily—at noon, and sat with him for an hour. The Duke partook of a light luncheon at half-past one, and when the weather permitted he took a drive; if the weather was unfavourable he walked in his conservatories.

He generally dined with the family, and sat with them for a couple of hours after dinner. Then he retired for the night. On Sundays he breakfasted half-an-hour earlier, in order that he might attend church.

Sometimes after dinner he took a hand at whist, or played chess with the Vicar, who was frequently invited to Court Royal. In former years he had spent the season in town, but his health no longer permitted his travelling by rail, and his children had accommodated themselves to a country life.

The Duke had pretended to pass over the care of the property to his son, and he no longer enquired into the balance; that the Marquess was expected to see to; but he amused himself with details, the complaints of the farmers, their demands for fresh buildings, their applications for drainage operations. These he took up, and it gave a zest to his drives to inspect the farms and see the proposed improvements. This was a little vexatious to the steward, who endeavoured to cut down expenses. The tenants knew that they were sure of a favourable answer from his Grace, and therefore applied direct to him.

The Duke had his private account at the bank; a modest sum of a thousand pounds was always paid in to this account, on which he drew independently of the house. The cost of keeping up Court Royal, the wages, the housekeeping, the gardens, belonged to a separate account, with which he did not concern himself. That was under the control of Lucy and her father; subject, of course, to Lady Grace, if she chose to supervise it, but this she never did.

The general accounts, the rent roll, the receipts, the outlay on the estates, the charges on the property, the interest on the mortgages and loans, these the Marquess was supposed to examine every half-year; but he did so in a careless, impatient manner, and refused to take an interest in the property. Time enough, he thought, when forced to do so, on his succession to the estates.

'Sit down, Herbert,' said the Duke, when Lord Saltcombe entered. 'We must have a little quiet conversation together. You are going to Plymouth; it is well, you must be with your *fiancée* as much as you can to learn each other's characters and habits. I confess to a little surprise. I had thought you would have been guided in your choice less by caprice. Still —you are the judge of what is best for yourself. In the matter of fortune everything is satisfactory, and perhaps that is not a point to be disregarded, as our fortunes are not exactly what they were. The property was heavily burdened when it came to me; still, I have lived very quietly of late, and a margin must be left to turn over and extinguish such debts as were formerly contracted.'

The Marquess looked down.

'You have been shut out from the world for some years, Herbert. That has not met with my approval. Your place was in London, and you ought to have been in Parliament.

Now that you are about to be married I expect you will take your proper position in the social and political constellations. I hope this union is one of genuine affection.'

'I trust it meets with your approval.'

'I have nothing against it. The young lady has been properly educated, the family is respectable. The Rigsbys of Lincolnshire are known; they have been settled in that most dismal of counties for several centuries. They have a Baronet in the family—a late creation. Well, in these days one must not be too nice.' After a pause, the Duke went on: 'You are quite right to go to Plymouth. I wish you there to take a good suite of rooms in the Royal Hotel, and live up to your station. Take some of your own servants with you; your valet, and your own riding and driving horses, and your groom. I should advise a dog-cart and a drag. I am not one to encourage extravagance, indeed I hate display, it is vulgar; but your position demands a certain amount of appearance. You are the representative of the house, now that I am a poor broken creature, and cannot show in public. An Eveleigh must always maintain his dignity. I beg you to remember this. Never let yourself down.'

Lord Saltcombe, not knowing what answer to make, bowed. His father accepted this movement as a sign of submission to his will.

'One thing more. I believe you have not as yet made your *fiancée* a present. This, of course, you must do. I have looked through the family jewels, but see nothing that quite answers the purpose. I should like you to spare no expense; run up to town and choose out a suitable present, a diamond necklet or tiara. It is possible you may not have the sum sufficient at your command. I have therefore drawn you a blank cheque on my private account. Fill in the sum when you know what you want.'

'I cannot—my father.'

'You must, Herbert. It is my desire. I shall be annoyed if you give your betrothed a present unworthy of a future Duchess of Kingsbridge.'

Lord Saltcombe was too agitated to speak.

'Herbert,' continued the old Duke, 'I give my full consent to this union, and I ask the Almighty on my knees to shower His richest blessing upon it. May you be happy as I was happy with your dear, never-to-be-forgotten mother. You deserve it. A blessing is attached to filial obedience, and you have

always been a dutiful and loving son ; you have never caused me an hour's pain, never given me occasion to blush to think that a son of mine has stained the hereditary honour.'

Lord Saltcombe returned to his apartments in a condition of confusion and distress that made him thankful Beavis was not there to see him. He threw himself in his chair, covered his face with his hands, and a sob broke from his bosom and relieved the immediate tension.

He sat thus thinking, hiding his face from no one, for he was alone, for a quarter of an hour. Then, as though fired by a sudden resolution, he took a key from his pocket and opened his cabinet. He drew forth a drawer and took from it a bundle of faded letters. He set his lips closely, and his brows were contracted.

The fire was low. He took the tongs and raked it together, and put on a billet of wood. Then, to brisk it up, cast on it the scraps of paper from the floor. Now the fire flamed, and the dry wood caught and crackled.

Lord Saltcombe leaned back in his chair, and untied the bundle of letters. He drew the notes from their envelopes, and looked at one, then another. His face relaxed ; an expression of pain of a different sort settled on it. He made an effort to recover his firmness and to carry out his resolution. He threw one, two, three envelopes on the flames, and sighed as they flared. He knelt down, and placed the letters on the hearth. Then he drew from the cabinet the little miniature already described, and looked at it long, with face that twitched with suffering. He put it towards his lips—as about to kiss it, then recovered himself, and placed it on the little pyre of old letters.

'They must all go together now,' he said, and put his hand to the billet of wood to bring it to the little pile. But the wood was hot and burnt his fingers. Then he took the tongs, and picked up a coal, and laid it on one of the papers. The coal died out, and Lord Saltcombe took the paper, and brushed away the charred fragments. He struck a vesta match, but his hand trembled and he was unable to fire with it the old letters.

Then he stood up, and leaning his elbow on the chimney-piece, rested his head against his hand, and looked down on the miniature on the hearth. How lovely that face was ! The great dark eyes seemed to plead for pity. 'Why should I ?' asked the Marquess. 'It must be done before I am married.

Then I must utterly destroy all memories of the past—but not yet! surely not yet!' He stooped, picked up the miniature, tied the letters together again, and replaced them and the picture in their old drawer.

The resolution of Lord Saltcombe had led him to burn three envelopes.

CHAPTER XXVII.

REVOLT.

Mr. LAZARUS was engaged on his dinner. He sat on the chair without a bottom, with a plate on his knees. In that plate were three cold Jerusalem artichokes. He had a fourth on the end of an iron fork, and he held it between his eye and the window. 'It is deadly grey in flesh,' he said, 'and sits cold on the stomick. I wish Joanna were back to warm my victuals. It is not the quality I object to, it's the coldness. There is a sort of damp chill about these cold artichokes, like grey November fog solidified into vegetable pills. Joanna is a long time about her business. I know what it is—the great dinners she gets there, goose and sage stuffing, roast beef and Yorkshire pudding, the beef with little white curls of horse-radish on it, like the first locks on the head of an innocent babe, that a mother loves to play with. One of the first things that ever I can remember, when I turn my eyes lovingly back upon childhood, is tapioca pudding; how delicious it was, golden on top like cream, and browned here and there, made with good milk and an egg. There is a deal of difference between the tapioca now and what it was then. Now best Rio is eightpence-half penny, Penang is fivepence; then it cost me nothing. Those childish days were lovely. I paid for nothing, I consumed everything gratis. They will never return, never. I wish Joanna were back; I can't stomach these artichokes. I'd make her eat them, it is a sin to waste them, and I'd get myself a cheesecake.' The door was thrown open, and Joanna appeared, thrusting her box before her with one hand and both knees, whilst with the left hand she clasped a flower-pot.

'There!' said she, 'I'm back, Mr. Lazarus. The man outside is waiting to be paid for carrying my box. He wants a

shilling, but he can be forced to be content with ninepence if you refuse to give more. I want some dinner.'

'Here, take it,' said Lazarus, handing her the plate; 'do as you always have done—tear the very food from my mouth. You long-necked cormorant! You've done growing and ought to be ashamed of yourself.'

'The porter is waiting to be paid,' said Joanna.

'I suppose eightpence and a French sou will do, if I slip it among the English coppers. Take this; you shall get no more. With a little effort you might have carried the box yourself.'

An altercation was heard outside when the girl offered the porter the eightpence and sou. Lazarus put his hands in his pockets and listened with composure. To put his hands in his pockets he was forced to stand up; then he sat down in the bottomless chair, and clenched them in the position where he had thrust them. Not another halfpenny would he give, but if the porter were inclined to deal, that was another matter.

Joanna returned triumphant. 'He went away cursing all Jews,' she said.

'Let him curse,' answered Lazarus; 'that relieves temper and don't hurt. There are your victuals, Joanna. I hope you've not been so pampered as to have your stomach spoiled. I suppose geese have been thick as quails in Kibroth-hataavah. I don't like goose, it is greasy food. Mutton, boiled, with caper sauce, roast with currant jelly,—bah! you are puffy about the face, laying on fat in flakes. Tapioca, I suppose, every day, gorging yourself on it,—guzzling greengage trifle, making a beast of yourself on meringues. I had a meringue once, the day I was married, that ended in gall and bitterness. I don't mean the meringue, I mean the marriage. The meringue cost me fourpence.'

Joanna took the plate of cold artichokes, turned them contemptuously over, and ate them.

'I'll tell you what it is, master,' she said; 'I've toiled and lied for you, and done a deal of dirty work. I've done dirty work here, mending old clothes, and patching and darning carpets, but the dirtiest work you ever set me to do is what I have done at Court Royal. What has come of it all? I am cheated out of two dances. You sent me there, just when I was about to get a little amusement and learn dancing, and when I got there, and did learn, you gave me work to do that forced me to run away and miss the tenants' ball. It is not fair.'

'Run away!' echoed Lazarus. 'You haven't run away, and not done what you was sent after? You can't have been so wicked?'

'I've done it,' said Joanna, 'and truly ashamed of myself I am. I tell you what it is, Mr. Lazarus, unless I was pawned to you and couldn't do otherwise, I'd strike. But you know you've got me, and can drive me where you will. I give you fair warning, I'll kill myself rather than do more of that sort of dirty work; then you may whistle for your half-a-sovereign, and the interest—seven shillings. I reckon you'll be careful not to drive me to extremities, lest you are left seventeen shillings to the bad.' Joanna looked round the kitchen. 'What a proper mess you've got everything into whilst I have been away! It is a piggery. No wonder Moses forbade you eating swine's flesh, it would be sheer cannibalism. Everything was bad before, but it is bad and rusty and dirty now. I will not have it. Take yourself out of that seatless chair; you're sinking through it so low that in another minute you'll be sitting on the floor. Get out; I'll bring you down a sound chair from upstairs.'

'The chair is good, Joanna, it only wants the oven tray across it.'

'I will not have it here. I have been in kitchens that were a pleasure to live in. There every bit of wood was white, and every bit of metal shone. I could have been happy there, but for what you'd set me at, and that took the pleasure out of everything. Look at that window-pane, cracked where the boys threw a stone eighteen months ago. A dab of putty holds it together, and stops the hole where the stone went through. It must be mended. I will not bear it left like this.'

'Go along, Joanna; now you have glutted your appetite, go and get on your old clothes. Those you have on are too good for this shop.'

'No—I will not put on such mean, miserable rags again. I have worn what are neat and clean, and neat and clean I shall dress henceforth. Unless I have my own way, I won't light the fire and boil the kettle, I won't peel the potatoes, nor turn uniforms, nor sell anything. I'll lie in bed, and you won't get me out except with dynamite.'

'You've been spoiled,' said the pawnbroker. 'Oh, the wickedness of the world! I had you here, sheltered under my wing from every harm, and when I send you out a little way,

you become a prey to all kinds of vice and corruption of morals. You're too grand now to do anything. Why wasn't you a Jewess born, and then nothing you went through would have taken the love of economy out of you! I suppose you've seen such grand things that nothing here seems good. Perhaps you'd like plate glass in the kitchen window, and a silver stew-pan for the potatoes, and an eider-down petticoat, and a dado round the walls of the scullery!'

'He who has seen the sea doesn't call every puddle a lake,' said Joanna. 'I'd rather live in one of the Duke's cottages with deal tables and clean plates than among your valuables, allowed only to use what is worthless. No, master,' added Joanna, looking round, 'it has done me good to go away. I've seen a bit of a new world, and I'm wiser than I was. You can't get a shirt off a naked man, nor feathers off a toad, so I do not expect of you to let me have everything new and bright, but I will have things sound and clean.'

'Whither are you going now?' he asked, as she made a movement towards the stairs.

'I am going after my flowers,' she answered; 'I want to see how they are. I've thought of them and longed to see them again, and they are about the only things here I have cared to see once more. I'll tell you another thing. Get the sack of shavings from under the counter, and empty it in the cupboard under the stairs, where I keep my kindling. I'll sleep in the shop no more. I'll have a proper bed and a room to myself. I am eighteen; in another year mother will redeem me; if not, I shall redeem myself, my own way.' Then she ascended the stairs.

Lazarus struggled out of his chair. Having his hands in his pockets, and sinking deeper through the place where the seat had been, he was nipped, and could not extricate himself with ease. He shook his head, and, when his hands were free, withdrew them from his pockets, and rubbed his frowsy chin. 'What democratic ideas are afloat!' he said. 'What will the world come to?'

Then he seated himself on the flour-barrel. 'She'll be too proud to occupy this place of honour,' said he, 'where she's squatted time out of mind. I made a sad mistake plunging her in the whirlpool; now, she'll never be to me what she was—she'll be exacting in her food, for one thing. That reminds me, I have not had my dinner. I'll go and get something at the shop over the way.'

When Joanna came down, to her surprise she saw that the Jew had put a beefsteak pie and a plate of cheesecakes on the table, as well as a jug of porter. He had been across the street, and procured these delicacies. After a struggle with himself, he made the purchases, both because he was hungry himself, and because he was afraid of losing Joanna's services unless he treated her better. The contrast between her life at Court Royal Lodge and the Golden Balls, Barbican, was too dreadful not to shock her; he resolved to bridge the chasm with beefsteak pie and cheesecakes.

'There, there, my child,' he said; 'you see how I love you, and how glad I am to have you home. If you had given me earlier notice I would have had better fare ready for you; as it is, I have run out and spared no expense to provide you with dainties. Sit down, bring a chair from upstairs—two, one for me, I can endure that bottomless affair no longer, and tell me what of my business you have done at Court Royal.'

Joanna was mollified by what she saw. 'I thank you,' she said; 'you have watered my plants whilst I have been away. I thank you.'

'Don't mention it,' answered the Jew; 'the water cost nothing. What have you ascertained?'

'Here is the account,' said the girl, extending to him the note-book Beavis had observed under her hand in the office. 'I was caught taking my extracts, and I got away with difficulty. I lost my dance by it.'

The Jew clutched the book eagerly.

'To-night,' she said, 'is the tenants' ball, and I was to have been there. Lady Grace and Miss Lucy taught me to dance, and I should have been happy—but I was caught over the accounts and had to make off.'

The Jew was immersed in the accounts. He chuckled, and rubbed his knees.

'Past all recovery,' he said, and laughed.

'I do not know that,' said Joanna, helping herself to some pie. 'The Marquess is going to marry an heiress, tremendously wealthy, and that will set the property afloat again.'

'What—what is that?' exclaimed the Jew, starting up with almost a scream.

'There is a leathery coffee-planter come home from Ceylon with a pale daughter. Their name is Rigsby. A match has been made up between the Marquess of Saltcombe and Miss Rigsby. I don't suppose he cares much for her; but she is

worth a vast sum of money, and the steward, Mr. Worthivale, calculates to clear the property with her fortune. If you've got some of the mortgages, it is all right. You'll have the money.'

'I do not want the money. I will not be paid off!' cried the Jew, dashing his hands against his forehead.

Joanna took some more beefsteak pie. 'That is the first time I have heard you decline money,' she said dryly. 'What do you want? Not the property! Not to be a great landlord? Not to pig in Court Royal?'

'I will refuse the money. I will keep my grip on them.'

Joanna poured herself out some stout.

'If they choose to clear you off they can. I believe it is Mr. Worthivale's intention to do so immediately after the marriage has taken place,' she said.

'Who are these Rigsbys? Where are they?'

'I have told you what Mr. Rigsby is. They have taken a house in Plymouth or Stoke. They have taken a house there for the winter.'

'Do they know the state of affairs?'

'I cannot tell. I have not talked with them. I have found out a great deal. You cannot expect me to see into people's heads as if they were water-bottles. It is only cheapjacks who expose all their contents to the public.'

'Is this Rigsby a fool to sink his fortune in redeeming land which is daily depreciating in value?'

'I do not think he is a fool. He does not look like it.'

'Joanna! this spoils all my schemes. I have toiled and spun to get my web round them; and now are they to escape me? I could knock my brains out against the wall to think it.'

'Why should you wish the family harm? They are good people, a long way above such goodness as you or I could aspire to. They are loved and respected by all who know them. They hurt no one, and bless many. I am glad that there is a chance of their recovery.'

'I do not care for my money. I want to have them down, down under my feet.'

'Then I will help you no more. What harm have they done you?'

'The worst, the deadliest harm of all.'

'And you are moving against them out of personal revenge? I thought all you wanted was to be sure of your money.'

'I will tell you all—then you may judge if I have cause to love them; if I desire to spare them.'

Joanna laid aside her knife and fork; she was interested now, and alarmed. She was afraid to think that she had been working for the downfall of that dear Lady Grace whom she regarded above every mortal being.

'As you say, you are no longer a child. You are a woman, so you can hear the whole story. I was married eight years ago to Rachel; she was seventeen, and beautiful. She was very fond of theatrical performances; her mother had been on the stage, and it ran in the blood. Our people, leastways our Jewish girls, take to the stage as ducks to water, and as Jewish men to business. I married her on that day I spoke of, when I ate a meringue that cost fourpence. At that time the Marquess of Saltcombe was in the army, and with his regiment at Plymouth. He and some other officers got up amateur theatricals, for some charitable purpose nominally, really for their own entertainment. There was difficulty about filling the ladies' parts. They tried a professional, but she was not good-looking enough, or a stick, I do not recollect which, and so my wife was asked to assist. I objected, and we had a quarrel. She was headstrong and took her own way. We did not run smoothly together. It was with us broad and narrow gauge running over the same line; constant hitches, nothing to time, an occasional smash, and then a block. I suppose the performances went off to general satisfaction. I believe a hundred pounds was cleared for the charitable institution, but that did not concern me. What did concern me was the conduct of my wife; she got more estranged from me than before, and the end was she left me and went abroad with the Marquess.'

'Did you go after her?' asked Joanna.

'Not I. They went to the Island of Sicily—to Palermo. It would not have cost me a halfpenny less than fifty pounds to have gone in pursuit. My business would have suffered. In the time I would have been absent I might have turned over three hundred pounds. Besides, what was the good? I couldn't take her back. Was not that a dreadful thing, Joanna?'

'I am not surprised at anyone running away from you. I suppose you fed her on cold artichokes, and made her drink Ems water.'

'I did not,' said Lazarus angrily. 'I treated her as I ought. I know my duty. A queen is a queen; a pawn is a pawn.'

'Go on with your story,' said the girl. 'What happened after that?'

'To me?'

'I know without your telling me what happened to you. You settled deeper into dirt and drudgery.'

'As for her and the Marquess,' Lazarus continued, 'they were soon separated. His uncle, the Lord Ronald Eveleigh, went out after them as hard as he could. What took place between them I do not know; but I know the end was that the Marquess returned to England, left the army, and settled at Court Royal. What became of Rachel I never heard. She took care not to communicate with me, and I did not trouble myself to enquire after her. Whether she is on the stage or at the bottom of the sea is one to me. We have not met since, but I have a sort of idea she has taken to the theatre as her profession. It suited her tastes; she was fond of dress and display, and excitement, and was vain of her beauty. The Golden Balls did not agree with her; the Barbican, and the smell of Sutton Pool, and the life in a shop were all distasteful; besides, she never took keenly to me.'

'Did you love her very much?'

'Of course I did. She was young and beautiful, and I had never cared for any woman before. We might have been so happy,' sighed the Jew, 'and had a family to attend to the business; a girl to mind the kitchen, another to turn the old coats; and a boy would have been mighty useful to me in the shop and at my office up in town.'

'Do you love her still?'

'I know this: I hate the Marquess mortally,' he said. 'He has spoiled my life, he has taken from me my wife, has made a home to be no home at all, and has robbed me of every hope in the future.'

'But why do you try to drag down those who have never offended you—the Duke, and Lady Grace, and Lord Ronald?'

'I cannot touch him apart from them. They are all tied in one bundle, and must go together. You can see that, I suppose, by the light of reason.'

Joanna was silent.

Then the Jew looked round at the table and growled. 'A precious big hole you've eaten in the beefsteak pie, and gobbled up three-quarters of the cheesecakes. I hope you are satisfied at last, eh?'

'No, I am not.'

'What more do you want, next?' he asked sneeringly.

'I want to go to a dance, and till I have been at a ball I shall not be satisfied—there.'

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A PLAYBILL.

Mr. Lazarus left the house in the afternoon, and Joanna was alone. She at once set to work to make the kitchen tidy. She scoured the grease and rust from the pans, she washed the table, she sandpapered the fire-irons, she carried all the broken crockery to the ash-heap and smashed it up there, then replaced the pieces with sound articles from the stores above. She knew where there was a glazier's diamond, with it she cut a pane, she made her own putty, and reglazed the broken window.

Then she went upstairs to an attic room, with a pail of water, soap, and a scrubbing-brush, and washed the floor. She took up, piece by piece, a small iron bed, and put it together in the room; she fitted it with mattress, blankets, sheets, and coverlet. She dragged up a washhand-stand, and hung a looking-glass against the wall. She carried up a chair and a towel-horse, and then looked round with triumph. She had made for herself a very decent bedroom. One article of furniture was wanting—a chest of drawers. This she did not convey to her room, partly because she had nothing of her own to put in the drawers, and partly because it was too heavy for her to move unassisted. In the window she set her precious pot of lilies of the valley.

Then, tired with her journey and exertion, she seated herself on the bed, rested her head in both hands, and her elbows on her knees, and gave way to tears.

The contrast between the cleanliness and comfort of the Lodge and the dirt and disorder of the Golden Balls was too great not to make itself felt. She had gone on in one weary round of drudgery before because she knew of nothing different; now she had seen a better mode of life, and the old was insupportable; a return to it, unaltered, impossible. This she let

Lazarus understand. She would work for him as hard as before, but she would insist on being treated properly.

But her own condition was not that which disturbed Joanna; that which troubled her was the knowledge that she had been made use of by her master to work mischief against a family she had learned to respect. Of the Duke, indeed, she knew little, except what she had heard, but that had impressed her more than she acknowledged to herself. His greatness, the deference with which all regarded him—the way in which he was looked to as the source of all benefits, as the one who was the mainstay of the social order, as the one to whom, in cases of dispute, the ultimate appeal lay—this had formed an atmosphere of public opinion which she had inhaled, and which had nourished in her respect. She had seen little of Lord Ronald, but she had heard him spoken of as a man of strict integrity and perfect guilelessness. She had seen and spoken with the Marquess. Her box was unpacked. On the chimney-piece stood the canary yellow Dresden cup and saucer he had given her. Once he had come to his sister's room whilst she was having a dancing lesson, had recognised and spoken kindly to her. She could not feel towards him other than friendly regard.

'As for running away with Rachel,' she mused, 'I dare swear Rachel wanted to be run away with. If I had been the wife of Lazarus, I'd have done the same, have run with him to Palermo or Hong Kong—anywhere to be rid of Lazarus and the Barbican. To be married and to be pawned are two totally different cases,' argued the girl. 'To be married one gives consent, and if the situation don't suit, you leave it; but pawned is another matter—mother did that, and I can't run away. She must come with the ticket and release me. One would be wickedness, the other would not.'

Lady Grace she knew and loved as she loved no one else. She was miserable at the thought that she had been acting towards her with ingratitude, that Lady Grace might be able with justice one day to reproach her for having ill-repaid the kindness shown her. What would Lady Grace think of her now! of the way in which she had left her situation? Would she be told that she was detected at the account-books? Joanna's bosom heaved, her face was crimson, her cheeks stained with tears. She could not, she would not, leave the dear, good lady troubled with thoughts that she was ungrateful.

Joanna stood up, washed her face, and went downstairs.

She entered the shop, and looked about for a little wooden box. When she had found one to her mind, she lined it with cotton-wool, and placed in it her necklace of Roman pearls. Then she wrote a letter in what she knew was servant-maid English, which she folded and fastened up in the box with the pearls. This was the letter :

'For dear Lady Grace,—This is a present from her devoted, loving, faithful servant, Joanna. Joanna knows very well that it is not worthy of her acceptance (it cost only 2*l.* 18*s.* 6*d.* second-hand), but nevertheless she hopes Lady Grace Eveleigh will condescend to accept it, as Joanna has nothing in the world else except what she stands up in, and the pink silk dress which is spoiled. Joanna takes this opportunity of informing your ladyship that I didn't run away from my place, nor misbehave myself any way, but was summoned home on *urgent business.* Joanna will never, never, never forget and cease to love dear, sweet Lady Grace, and she begs to inform her ladyship that I value my pot of lily of the valley above every treasure the world contains.'

The girl's mind was relieved when she had written and fastened up this letter in the box. Then she directed the case, and as she had a few coppers still in her pocket, she was able to post and register it. Whilst she ran to the post-office, she left the shop locked. On her return she found a billsticker at the door, trying to get in.

'All right,' he said, 'I don't want to pawn nothing. Will y' take a bill and place it in the winder, please?'

He handed Joanna a bill, and went his way.

Lazarus was accommodating in the matter of bills of this description. Notices of Missionary Meetings, Harvest Festivals, a Circus, Services of Song, Ethiopian Serenaders, Prayer-meetings, dramatic performances, all went into his window promiscuously. He argued that folks might be attracted to read the bills and then see and fancy an article lying adjacent exposed for sale, a watch, a china figure, a church-service, a pair of opera-glasses, Baxter's 'Saints' Rest,' a Methodist hymnal, some old lace, a bicycle, or the portrait of an ancestor. Accordingly Joanna accepted the bill, and, before placing it in the window, spread it on the counter, and read it.

The bill was a theatrical notice. It announced that the distinguished Polish actress, Mlle. Palma Kaminski, of the Court Theatre, Warsaw, who had created such enthusiasm in London by her abilities, was about to favour Plymouth with

her presence, assisted by a corps of artists, all of eminence only inferior to her own.

The first performance would be a revival of Shakespeare's tragedy of 'Romeo and Juliet,' to be performed the ensuing week.

Joanna had never been to a play, but she was a greedy devourer of playbills. To her imagination, nothing—hardly a ball—could surpass the delight of a dramatic performance. She had read plays that had come into the shop—old comedies, tragedies, modern farces, and had formed an idea of what a theatre was, but Lazarus had never allowed her the pleasure of seeing a performance, even from the gallery.

Whilst she was studying the bill, suddenly Lazarus burst into the shop with livid face. He saw what she was reading, seized it, and crumpled it in his hands.

'Why do you do that?' asked Joanna.

'I have seen her,' gasped the Jew. 'She is here—in Plymouth.'

'Seen whom—Lady Grace?'

'I have seen her—Rachel. She has dared to come here!'

'What has she come here for? Does she want to return to you? If so, she's a fool.'

'This is she,' he said, opening out the bill he had crushed, and with trembling finger he pointed to the name. 'She calls herself Palma Kaminski, but she is Rachel Lazarus. A Pole! She is nothing of the sort; she was born on Ratcliff Highway, and bred in Princes Street, Leicester Square.'

'Are you going to reclaim her, or kill yourself, like Romeo, because she is lost to you?'

'I do not know what I shall do. I am in a maze,' gasped the Jew. 'I'd serve her bad if I knew how. I'd beat her brains out if it weren't against the law. Where is the liberty of the subject, I'd like to know, as is so boasted of in this precious British empire? Ah! Joanna, I wish I could get her here and put her to sleep in the press-bed, and shut it up when she was sound. The coroner and jury would be sure to find "accidental death," and one could have a raffle of half-a-crown a share for the press-bed afterwards, and make a lot of money. I've known five pounds got out of a rope a man hanged himself with. The English lower orders are passionately attached to crime; they like to read about it, and talk about it, and think about it, and relish it in every way. If you come to consider, Joanna, what a dreary world this would

be without crime to season it! It would be like a dinner of cold beef without pickles. There'd be no yellow novels on the railway bookstalls, no sensational dramas on the boards; nothing but politics in the papers. I believe there wouldn't be any pawnshops. I'd like to know where we should be, we Jews, Joanna, in such a world as that. There would be no place for us at all. We must be thankful for things as we find them. The world without wickedness in it, and one with it, would be, to my taste, the difference between still hock and sparkling Moselle.'

'I reckon,' said Joanna, 'that in such a place as Kingsbridge, where all is goodness and kindness, and thought of one another, you'd be out of place like a rook on a frosty morning when the worms are in their holes.'

'They've hoodwinked you, like all those who come near them,' said Lazarus. 'But I can't talk of them. I must think of Rachel. Give me the paper.' He drew the bill from Joanna, who had smoothed it out on the counter. 'Kaminski! What a name! to change the beautiful Lazarus for an outlandish name like that, and she was Moses before I married her. To my mind, Joanna, our British aristocracy is like a scene on a stage, very beautiful to look at, but there is a lot hid away behind very shabby and very bad, of which most folk see and know nothing. You've looked on the grand Kingsbridge House like a young playgoer; all is beautiful, and innocence, and splendour. I know the other side. There is the great burden of debt, fresh loans, that scandal of the Marquess and Rachel. The world knows nothing of all this, but there it is.'

'I should like so much to go to a theatre,' said Joanna with a sigh.

Lazarus considered a moment, then his face lightened; he passed his fingers through his hair, ruffling it on end, giving him a wild look. 'You shall, Joanna; I promise you.'

'The gallery is only sixpence.'

'You shan't go in the gallery.'

'What? Stand outside, where a place costs nothing?'

'No, Joanna, you shall have the most expensive place in the whole theatre, that will cost two or three pounds.'

The girl stared at him. Then he smoothed down his hair, and elaborately and noisily blew his nose. He was excited.

'Yes, you shall. I will go also.'

'When? At doomsday?'

'No, we will go together, and sit in the stage-box, and see Romeo and Juliet.' Joanna clapped her hands.

'You shall see Rachel—Kaminski indeed! If she didn't like Moses, why not condense it to Moss; if she didn't like Lazarus, why not pull it out into St. Lazare? I've known some of our names turned about till you can't recognise them. Levi and Levison, for instance, who'd know them again as Lewis and Lawson? Even Cohen I've known altered into Colquhoon, and but for his nose you'd have thought the man a Scotchman.'

'You will really let me go?'

'I will take you myself. We shall be right above her, face her, and see if we do not spoil her play. Joanna, I'll heap on you all the jewelry in the shop, and you shall blaze in her eyes with diamonds and rubies and sapphires, and you shall have the most splendid dress of silk or satin money can buy; an old second-hand affair won't do. The best—if I have to send to Worth at Paris for it.'

Joanna looked at him in amazement. Had he lost his senses?

'Then she'll see you and me behind, and, sure as she is a daughter of Israel, it will cut her to the heart to think she has forfeited all that heap of jewelry.'

'But what will she think of me?'

'I do not know, nor care; she'll never suppose you are my maid of all work, a pawned piece of goods.'

'I don't believe a proper lady would pile on jewelry that way,' mused Joanna. 'I heard Lady Grace and Miss Lucy say something about real ladies being known by their quiet dressing. I can't imagine Lady Grace dressed like that, even at a play.'

'But you are not Lady Grace,' argued the Jew. 'That makes all the difference. She is at the top, and can afford to dress quietly. You are at the bottom, and must dress extravagantly, or you remain what you are—nothing.'

The girl considered; then she said, 'Miss Rigsby will be there, I am sure she will. She will be all of a blaze. It will be killing fun just to outblaze her. I'll put on everything I can, and I wish I'd two necks like an Austrian eagle to be able to put on more still.'

CHAPTER XXIX.

TWO STAGE BOXES.

It is impossible in words to describe the tumult of excitement, pride, admiration, in Joanna's bosom, as she took her place in the left stage box at the Plymouth Theatre Royal. She had never been in a theatre before. Her highest ambition had been to battle for herself a way to the front in the gallery. She occupied the most luxurious and expensive place in the theatre. She was dressed so beautifully that her head was turned. The pink silk was nothing to the dress she now wore, crimson velvet and cream-coloured silk, the latter exquisitely hand-embroidered. Her neck, her bosom, her head, were profusely adorned with diamonds. It was a marvel to Joanna whence the Jew had got them all. She wore rings on all her fingers; if the rings were too large, a little silk wound inside enabled her to wear them. She looked with astonishment at the foot-lights, at the orchestra where the players were tuning, at that great mystery, the curtain. Then she turned to examine the audience. The gallery and the pit were packed; in the dress circle were about twenty persons, and in the stalls perhaps a dozen. A poor house, a house to take the heart out of an actor. Joanna could not understand it. The rich have money, why do they not come? The poor do not grudge their shillings and sixpences.

Joanna attracted the attention of the house. Opera-glasses were directed towards her. She saw those in the stalls put their heads together, and she knew they were asking each other who she was. She was conscious that she was being admired, and to enable the people to see her better she stood up.

Lazarus was in evening dress, sitting back, facing the stage, so that he was invisible; it was hardly likely he would have been recognised. An evening suit had completely transformed him. Besides, those who attended the theatre were not his clients. He did not shrink from being seen; he was indifferent.

'Sit down, Joanna. How can you behave so strangely?' he said.

'No one could see my velvet bag with old Dutch silver clasps and chain and belt unless I stood up,' she answered.

'Perhaps you would like to stand up on the breasting of the box, to let folks see your red shoes?'

'I shouldn't mind,' said Joanna.

'But I do. Sit down and be quiet. The orchestra are going to begin. I did not bring you here to make a fool of yourself.'

'Very well, master. I'll fan myself, and then they can see my bracelets.'

Joanna was like a child with a box of new toys. She looked at herself in the little strip of mirror in the box, she played with and admired her jewelry, she took peeps at her feet shod in crimson satin shoes, she pressed back her chin to be able to see the glitter of a diamond brooch on her bosom. One bitter disappointment she had been forced to endure. She had desired to appear in low dress, but on trying one on, it was found that the contrast in colour between her face and one half of her neck and her bosom, and the other half of her neck, was too startling to allow of her thus appearing.

A tap at the door behind, and a gentleman entered the box. Joanna uttered a cry of delight, and took several steps to meet him. The gentleman was Charles Cheek.

'Why, Joanna!' he exclaimed, 'you here, in the royal box, as queen of beauty, wearing all the Crown jewels stolen by Lazarus from the Tower!'

'I am glad to see you again,' she said heartily. 'Here is a chair, sit down beside me and talk till the play begins, and then be mum.'

'I was in the stalls. I could hardly believe my eyes,' he said, 'but I looked and looked through my glasses till I had nearly satisfied myself you were my little friend of the roof-tree, when Lazarus's nose came round the corner, and a bit of a cheek-bone, and then I was sure.—What has induced you, Father Abraham, to come here dressed like a Christian? Have you brought the girl to show off a set of diamonds you want to sell?'

'I've brought her here,' answered the Jew, 'because I am a generous and indulgent master. She saved my house from fire and from burglars, and has deserved a treat for other services she has rendered me, so I have stepped out of my usual course of life to indulge her.'

'Do you often come to the play?' asked Joanna.

'Very often. I would come always if I thought you would be here.'

'Sit down, and don't throw foolish speeches at me which you do not mean. I am so glad to see you again. Do you know, I have learned to dance since I saw you last—waltz, and cotillon, and lancers, and quadrille,—these last very imperfectly for want of enough to make up sets; for want of persons we danced with chairs.'

'Where have you been? Who taught you?'

'Those are secrets which even you may not know.'

'Why are you not in the pink silk and pearls I gave you?'

'I am more splendid now; do look at me well. What do you think of this gown—puffed and slashed at the sleeves? is it not lovely, like a lady in an old painting? Look down at my shoes. They are sweet. Once, do you recollect, you laughed at me because I was in my stocking-soles, and there were holes in the stockings. Now there is not even a thread wrong in my stockings, and the shoes are simply lovely.'

'Have you worn out the pink silk?'

'No. Mr. Lazarus spilt salt water over it, and it is spoiled. He was forced to give me this instead.'

'I!' cried the Jew. 'I have not given you this. Do not believe the girl, it is not true. The gown is hired for the night, at one guinea.'

'Hold your tongues, both of you!' said Joanna. 'The overture has begun.'

The Jew was not particularly pleased at Charles Cheek appearing in the box and remaining there, but he could not tell him to leave. He drew back among the folds of the coloured hangings, with his eyes on the curtain, and looked sulky. Charles Cheek and Joanna entirely disregarded him.

'I say,' whispered the girl during the overture, 'why are there so few persons in the more expensive seats?'

'Because,' answered the young man, 'the better-class people despise provincial theatres; it is *chic* to do so. It means that they have seen things so much better done in London that they cannot endure what is inferior.'

'But they lose great enjoyment by this nonsense.'

'Of course they do, but——' He shrugged his shoulders.

'Hush! Oh, do hush!' exclaimed Joanna. 'See! see!'

The curtain rose. Then she had eyes and ears only for the stage. In the third scene Juliet makes her first appearance. Lazarus had been moving uneasily through the two former. He bit his nails, wiped his brow, and became every moment paler. Then he put his hand forward, touched Mr.

Cheek, and said somewhat roughly, 'Excuse me, I want the front chair.' The young man started, looked surprised, and at once surrendered the seat. 'I am short-sighted,' explained the Jew. Mr. Cheek bowed, and withdrew to his place in the stalls.

Joanna was annoyed, not so much at losing her companion as at the disturbance, distracting her attention from the play. She frowned, and tapped her fan impatiently on the cushion.

Lazarus sat beside her, his face turned towards the stage; she saw that it was cadaverous, and that his muscles twitched with nervousness.

Next moment she had forgotten him to observe Juliet. At the appearance of Mlle. Palma Kaminski, the famous Polish actress from the Imperial Theatre, Warsaw, the gallery burst into applause. The pit took up the applause; the clapping of hands, thumping of heels and umbrella ferrules on the floor for a minute brought the play to a standstill. The dress circle languidly patted its hands, the stalls remained unmoved.

In recognition of this reception, Mlle. Palma stepped forward to the footlights and curtseyed; as she did so, she raised her eyes and looked at the boxes for a moment; her eyes remained fixed on the stage box on her right only for a moment, and then she turned her head away without a token of emotion. Lazarus leaned back, his face quivering, his hands clenched. Their eyes had met.

Joanna observed the famous actress with the closest attention. This was Rachel—the beautiful Rachel whom Lazarus had loved, and who had wrecked his life. This was she who had so bewitched the Marquess that he had forgotten honour and right, and had run away with her to Sicily. Joanna was sufficiently near to see the make-up in her face, the paint, the powder, the antimony about the eyes, the rouge on the cheeks. She saw that Rachel was lovely, had been very lovely, but—fatal *but*—she was becoming stout.

Joanna laughed. The consciousness was borne in on her that she was herself more beautiful than this woman who had made two men miserable—who had broken two lives. The applause had just ceased, and a short silence succeeded before the performers resumed their dialogue. On that short interval of silence Joanna's laugh broke, and instantly the beautiful actress looked at her. She looked intently, questioningly; then turned her eyes for a moment, only for a moment, on Lazarus.

None observed this but Joanna, not even Lazarus, who had drawn back and covered his eyes. There was something in the look that startled Joanna. The colour mounted and suffused her face and throat. Her pleasure in the play was gone ; she wished she were away. She hid her arms lest the bracelets should be seen ; she threw a kerchief round her neck to hide the chains. With a look the actress had revenged the laugh.

Joanna was not able to recover her interest in the play. She looked on, but her thoughts were elsewhere. She was glad that Lazarus had withdrawn and concealed himself in the shadow, leaning against the side of the box.

When the first act was over, she signed with her fan to Charles Cheek, and he came up from the stalls.

'A poor company,' said he, taking the seat she indicated. 'I hold that the educated are quite right in staying away ; in the provinces the star system is reduced to absurdity. What a stiff Lady Capulet ! and a nurse without humour. Romeo is a stick. We have not seen yet what La Palma is made of. She is beautiful, but plump. A few years ago, may be, she was irresistible. Hollo, some vis-à-vis, I see.'

The box-keeper was introducing a party of two gentlemen and two ladies into the stage-box immediately opposite. Joanna at once recognised the Marquess of Saltcombe, the Rigsbys, and Miss Stokes. Lazarus, leaning back with his face to the curtain, did not notice the arrivals ; Joanna glanced over her shoulder at him, and saw that he was too preoccupied with his own thoughts to look about him.

She fixed her eyes very attentively on the Marquess. He was serene, polite to Miss Rigsby, contending with the aunt which should hold the niece's scarf of woven blue and crimson silk and gold fibre—an Indian manufacture.

The curtain rose ; Romeo proceeded to climb the wall into Capulet's garden. The lights were turned down, and a ray was cast, purporting to be that of the moon, on Juliet's window. There was not sufficient light in the stage-box opposite for Joanna to see the face of Lord Saltcombe. The moonbeam was unsteady on Juliet's window, and badly focussed. But when Juliet sighed 'Ah me !' she thought she saw him start. Joanna watched the box opposite throughout the scene far more closely than the stage.

The footlights were turned up for the next scene, that in Friar Laurence's cell, and then Joanna was able to see the face

of the Marquess. It was pale as death. Miss Rigsby leaned back in her chair and spoke to him as he was standing behind her, and he stooped and replied. He handed her a playbill, and pointed with his finger to something on it. Perhaps she had asked him who was the Romeo making such hot love to Juliet. Joanna saw that he maintained his composure outwardly. Only his deadly pallor showed how stirred he was within. He had come to the theatre with the Rigsbys, with whom he had dined, in complete ignorance of the fact that the Polish actress from Warsaw was Rachel Lazarus. Joanna turned to her master; she saw at a glance that he had recognised his enemy. His face was convulsed; he drew further back into the shadows, that he might not be seen.

Joanna looked from one man to the other. Here were two men, one at the head of the scale, the other at the foot—both the victims of one beautiful woman. 'What power there is in woman for good or bad!' thought Joanna. 'For my part,' she added to herself, 'I would hurt no one—unless he got in my way.'

It amused the girl to notice the slightly foreign intonation in Juliet's voice as she spoke. Knowing what she did of her origin, she was sure that this was put on to keep up the part of Pole Rachel had assumed. 'She is clever,' thought Joanna; 'clever to control herself under the eyes of the two men she has ruined. But perhaps she has not as yet recognised the Marquess.' The light was on her face, and he was in darkness. 'I wonder what she will do when she does see him?'

'Joanna,' said the Jew, in a whisper that was hoarse and constrained, 'I want to go. Get ready.'

She answered, 'I am not going. I came for one play, and I am in for two.'

'I am not well.'

'Then get better. I am not going.'

During the scene in Capulet's garden between Juliet and the nurse, Joanna watched the actress, but was unable to detect whether she had seen the Marquess or not. Once her eyes travelled in the direction of the stage-box on her left, but the glance was quick and passing, and no muscle of her face, no failure of her voice, gave sign that she had perceived her former lover.

The curtain fell on the second act; as it fell, one of the footlights flared and snapped the glass chimney that screened

it. No one paid particular attention to it; the broken glass was not removed, a fresh chimney not added.

Charles Cheek brought Joanna an ice; he offered one to Lazarus, who refused with a shake of the head.

'He is not well,' said Joanna. 'Leave him alone; he wants to go away, but I will not hear of it till the play is out. Don't notice him. He will be better presently.'

'I'll get you a drop of brandy, Mr. Lazarus.'

The Jew nodded, and the good-natured young man hurried away to fetch a glass of spirits.

'Do you know who those are opposite us?' asked Mr. Charles Cheek, on his return. 'I've heard one is the Marquess of Saltcombe, son of the Duke of Kingsbridge, and the other people are called Rigsbys. I don't know anything about them.'

'The Marquess is engaged to Miss Rigsby—that pasty young lady in magenta silk and pink roses in her hair. The person at her side is her aunt, and the brown man is her father. They are worth a great deal of money.'

'How do you know all this?'

'In the way of business,' answered the girl, with an air of indifference.

'I have heard enquiries on all sides as to who you are. People have been lost in wonder and admiration. What is your name? I must satisfy those who ask. I have been unable to do so out of ignorance.'

'I am Miss Rosevere, an heiress,' answered Joanna.

'An heiress!' echoed Charles Cheek, with a laugh.

'Yes, sole heiress, executrix, and residuary legatee to Mr. Lazarus.' She turned round to her master with a mischievous face. He was in no mood to answer.

'How are you?' asked the young man. 'Better? Has the brandy revived you?'

Lazarus nodded.

'So I may answer to enquiries that you are a Miss Rosevere?'

'Yes. That is my name, though I don't often have it mentioned. You may add—an orphan. Go back to your place in the stalls, and tell those who ask who I am. You need not add—slave to a Jew pawnbroker—pawned for ten shillings. Don t say that, as you value my friendship.' So she dismissed him, then leaned on the red velvet cushion, playing with her fan, looking about her, and watching what went on in the stage box opposite. Mr. Rigsby was in conversation with Lord

Saltcombe ; his voice was loud and harsh, and Joanna could almost catch what he said. He was talking about an amateur dramatic performance got up by the officers at Colombo. Some delay ensued before the curtain rose. The orchestra performed a selection from 'Il Trovatore.' A smell of oranges pervaded the theatre. The gods were devouring them in great quantities in the gallery, and throwing the peel over into the pit. A bald-headed gentleman was the object they particularly aimed at, and when an urchin succeeded in casting an entire ingeniously removed peel so as to light in a ring on his glossy skull, like a cap, the feat was uproariously applauded.

The noise only ceased when the curtain rose on a public place, and attention was arrested by the fight between Mercutio and Tybalt : those in the gallery were greatly disappointed that the former died off the stage, and only reconciled when Tybalt was killed by Romeo under their eyes.

The scene that followed gave less promise of amusement. Juliet appeared in her room, invoking the approach of night :—

> 'Gallop apace, you fiery-footed steeds,
> Towards Phœbus' lodging.'

As she spoke her passionate monologue she came forward, and as she did so, the draught from her skirts made the jet of the broken footlight flare up.

'There should be a wire net about eighteen inches off the lamps,' said Mr. Rigsby. 'I see none here, but in town it is so, is it not, Saltcombe ?'

Lord Saltcombe bowed, he could not speak. Rachel's eyes had met his at the exclamation, 'Give me my Romeo.' The nurse entered, bringing the rope-ladder and the news of the death of Tybalt, which she delivers so badly that Juliet for the moment supposes she is told of the loss of her lover. This is the first occasion on which an actress of any power can show passion. Palma rose to it. With a piercing cry that rang through the house she rushed forward, threw up her arms, and was convulsed with agony.

> 'O break, my heart !—poor bankrupt, break at once ! '

Then dashing her hands over her eyes,—

> 'To prison, eyes ! ne'er look on liberty.'

Stooping, gathering up the dust, then throwing it down, as into a grave at a funeral,—

'Vile earth, to earth resign; end motion here:
And thou, and Romeo'——

She did not finish the sentence, the whole theatre rose with a cry of horror. The flame from the exposed jet had caught the white gauze of Juliet's dress and danced up her skirt.

The agitation was indescribable. Women shrieked, men shouted. The curtain fell, and a smell of fire pervaded the atmosphere lately impregnated with the odour of oranges.

Miss Rigsby looked round.

The Marquess had uttered a cry of agony, and had fallen against the partition, with his hand to his brow. In another moment he dashed from the box and ran behind the scenes.

'For mercy's sake,' he cried, 'how is she? Where is she?'

The stage-manager brushed past him. The roar of voices mingled with cries beyond the curtain drowned his voice. The actors were in agitation. The commotion in the house ceased instantly when the manager appeared before the curtain.

'Ladies and gentlemen, a most unfortunate accident has happened. I believe and trust there is no occasion for alarm.' A burst of cheers. 'Mlle. Palma Kaminska is not as seriously hurt as might have been anticipated.' Renewed cheers. 'I have to ask your kind indulgence; the performance must cease.' He was himself so excited that he could hardly speak. His face was white, and his voice shook.

'Where is she?' asked the Marquess as the stage-manager stepped back.

'She has been conveyed to her lodgings.'

CHAPTER XXX.

PALMA.

Palma was driven at once to the house in which she had secured lodgings; one of the ladies of the company attended her. She was in great pain. A couple of surgeons were promptly summoned. The rumour of what had occurred spread, and people collected in the streets and about the door. The medical men said the case was grave, and that a nurse must be in constant attendance.

'Lord bless me!' said the old woman whose lodgings were taken by Palma. 'Where am I to get a nurse?'

'Her relations must be telegraphed for.'

'Blessings on me! What do I know about her relations?'

'We will see about a nurse. Perhaps one can be spared from the hospital.'

A rap at the door, and ring of the bell.

The woman opened it and saw a girl standing outside in a plain stuff gown, and a shawl over her head.

'Who are you?' she asked. 'What do you please to want?'

'I'm come to offer to nurse her,' was the reply. 'I've been sent; that is, I've come from him who stands nighest and yet furthest from her in the world.'

'Who is that?'

'Her husband.'

'If that be the case, come in. You are young. Can you nurse?'

'I can do what the doctor orders, and I hope I have my wits about me.'

'What is your name?'

'Rosevere.'

'Very well,' said the lodging-house keeper. 'I reckon you'll do as well as another.—Please, sir,' to the surgeon, 'give the young woman orders what she is to do.'

When the accident had taken place Joanna had turned home and stripped off her grand dress and donned a plain one; then she came down into the kitchen, where Lazarus was crouching over the fire.

'It is a judgment,' said the Jew. 'Heaven is just, and has cast its thunderbolt at her. I am glad of it. No one hurts me without suffering for it.'

Joanna turned on him. 'I am going to her,' she said. 'I shall nurse her if they will let me. Shall I say you sent me?'

'No,' answered the Jew; 'don't mention my name.' He had assumed a hardness which ill concealed his inward emotion. In his breast was a tumult of mingled feeling—old love revived, sorrow, revenge, hate,—so mixed that he did not himself know what he desired.

'You may go, Joanna,' he said. 'If she needs anything—that is, in moderation—let me know, but I will not see her, I will not see her, remember that.'

So Joanna went. The girl was greatly affected. Tears came into her eyes, but she drove them back. She had made

up her mind to be with Palma. She went first to the theatre to ascertain where the actress lived; the house was not far distant. She hastened thither. On her way down the street she passed Lord Saltcombe. His face was raised, he was looking at a window whence a yellow light shone through a drawn blind. Shadows passed over the surface of the blind. A gas lamp was near, and the face of Lord Saltcombe was illumined. It was full of agony—it was the face of a man in despair. She walked by, then turned and came back to him; his suffering face filled her with pity. She said in a low tone, 'Lord Saltcombe, I am going in to nurse her. Ask no questions at the door. I will give you signs at the window: when I hold up my hands, have hope; when I hold them down, her case is very bad; when I hold them out, and you see against the blind the black shadow of a cross—she is dead.'

He nodded. He did not recognise her, he did not look at her. He did not wonder who she was that knew him by name. He tried to thank her. He could not.

Then she went on. If she had been refused admission she would have thrust herself in. Joanna was not one to take a refusal.

She was conducted to the room where lay the poor woman. Cotton-wool and oil covered her wounds. The face was uninjured. She moaned and tossed her head from side to side on the pillow. The paint was on the cheeks, the antimony darkened the eyes, but tears had washed the white powder away in long furrows. Beneath the paint the flame of fever burnt in her cheeks. Joanna took a sponge and washed her face. The cool water soothed the sufferer for a moment, then she began again to moan and turn her head with a mechanical regularity from side to side. She seemed imperfectly conscious. Her fellow-actress was at her side; the honest sympathetic tears had washed her face into a strange mottle. She had hold of Palma's hand, and patted and kissed it, and spoke to her cheering words of promise of health.

'You'll be all right to-morrow. You know you are going to take the world by storm with your Lady of Lyons. There! don't be down. It is only a trifle. You did Juliet regular splendid—first-classto-night.'

'You may go,' said Joanna. 'You are out of place here, and do not understand the management of the sick. Leave her to me. I am sent to her.'

'Are you experienced, girl?' asked the surgeon.

'I know what is what,' answered Joanna, looking him full in the face.

'You have plenty of natural cleverness, I can see,' said the surgeon. 'Now attend to me. I will give you instructions that must be closely followed.'

'Hadn't that lady better go first? she bothers me and Ra—— I mean the sick woman.'

'I agree with you.' The surgeon dismissed the actress.

'Now,' said Joanna, 'say what you will, I will not go from it a hair's-breadth.'

After receiving her instructions she said gravely, 'Tell me frankly: is there hope?'

'Where there is life there is hope,' he answered.

She looked at him with her shrewd eyes, and standing between the light and the window, held up *one* arm.

Lord Saltcombe paced the street hour after hour throughout the night. He could not leave it. Rest was impossible. One by one the lights in the houses were extinguished, but the window of Palma's room remained illumined. Within lay the woman—the sole woman—he had ever loved, and he had loved her with all the passion in his nature. Carried away by that passion he had committed a great wrong, a wrong which rankled in his heart. His conscience never acquitted him; it judged and condemned him daily. If he had loved innocently he might have shaken off his passion, or been spared by it to make himself a name, to become great and good among his fellow-men. But this guilty incident had morally maimed him. He had not the energy, the courage, after that, to face his fellow-men. There are some who rise after a fall, stronger than they were before. Their fall has taught them caution, has deepened their character, has inspired them with earnestness. There are others who, when once tripped up, lie prostrate the rest of their days. Such was Lord Saltcombe. He had not the moral vigour to efface the past by active well-doing.

The clock of St. Andrew's Church chimed after the stroke of three, and still the Marquess was in the street. He was cold and tired. An icy perspiration covered his brow. He had seen the sign at the window three or four hours before; it had not given him much hope. A gnawing pain was at his heart. Was this the first manifestation in him of that disease which sapped the life and activity of his father? Had his present great emotion provoked it to warn him of its presence?

The chimes had scarce done playing 'The Last Rose of Summer' when the blind was drawn aside, and Lord Saltcombe saw the girl beckoning to him. In another moment the house door was opened gently, and she appeared at it. She held her finger to her lips, came outside, and said, 'Rachel is conscious. Come, and see her, but promise to go when I give the word.' He nodded. 'Follow me softly, make no noise. Everyone else in the house is asleep.'

He obeyed. He was in his patent-leather boots, in his dress suit, with a light overcoat. He stepped softly after Joanna. If anyone heard the steps, that person supposed it was the footfall of the doctor, turned in bed, and slept again. Joanna thrust open the chamber door and let the Marquess in. She did not enter herself, she closed the door and stood on the landing with her hands to her ears that she might not hear what was said. As Lord Saltcombe passed her into the room she looked in his face: it was older by many years, white, lined, hollow about the eyes, and sunken at the cheeks. Her heart came into her mouth, she put her hands to her white apron, and raising it wiped her eyes, then shook her head defiantly, and clasped her hands over her ears.

Lord Saltcombe stepped up to the bed, looking with his whole soul into the burning face of the poor woman. Then he sobbed, sank on his knees by her side, and hid his face in the bedclothes.

'Herbert!' she said in a low tone, and put out her hand for his, 'I wanted to see you—to say good-bye.'

'Rachel!' He could utter no more.

'It is now seven years since—since Sicily.'

'Rachel,' he said, 'God forgive me. If it were possible in any way to undo the past, if it were within my power to make compensation, to expiate the wrong done, I would do my utmost. Rachel, I ruined your life, and I destroyed the honour and happiness of another man's home.'

She shook her head. 'You do not know Lazarus.'

'It matters nothing who or what he be; I wronged him past undoing, and the knowledge of this has lamed my life. You—you above all——'

'Do not speak of me,' she said. 'I forgive you—but you were not in fault. I had set my heart on the stage, I ran away for the love of art—not for love of you.'

'Is that true?'

She slightly moved her head. 'The consciousness of power

burned in me, and life with Lazarus and his sordid belongings was unendurable. I ran away; you know I forced myself on you, I asked you to free me. It was not that I cared for you—forgive me that I say so; if I pain you it is for your good—I used you but as a means of escape. I hungered for art; I knew that the stage was my proper sphere; and now—and now—I am consumed in the element I elected.' Her head began to turn from side to side uneasily.

He did not speak, he watched her in silent remorse and agony. She had shut her eyes. He was not sure whether she were conscious. He held her hand; it was a hand of fire. Presently she stayed the rocking of her head, and opened her eyes. 'It was I,' she said—'it was I who spoiled your life, not you mine. I have nothing to forgive. I must ask pardon of you.'

'Of me! Oh, Rachel!'

'I used you but as a means to an end. Who were you with in the stage-box to-night—yesterday—when was it?'

He told her.

'You are not married?' she asked, and looked at him.

He shook his head.

'You must marry, and forget me,' she said. 'It was I—it was I who was in the wrong.' Presently she added, 'Beware of Lazarus; he will never forget, never forgive.' Then she shut her eyes, and began again to sway her head and moan.

He watched her without speaking; she let go his hand, and held her fingers up as feeling for something in the air.

'What do you want, Rachel?'

She turned her face and opened her eyes; the light of reason had gone from them. She put her arm out of the bed-clothes, and waved it:—

> 'Farewell! God knows when we shall meet again,
> I have a faint cold fear thrills through my veins,
> That almost freezes up the heat of life.
> Nurse! what should she do here?
> My dismal scene I needs must act alone.'

She thought herself on the stage. She tried to rise, and moaned and fell back.

Joanna entered; she did not raise her eyes to the face of Lord Saltcombe. She signed to him to go; he stood a moment longer looking at the poor woman, now unconscious, and stole away.

Then Joanna seated herself by the bed, and watched the sufferer. Her face, generally brimming with intelligence and full of self-assurance, was now kindled with an expression of tenderness and pity such as it had not borne before. She knew the whole story of this dying woman. She had been brought to look upon a heart—a man's heart—enduring unutterable agony. She put out her finger and touched the bedclothes where moistened ; she knew what had moistened them—tears of contrition and humiliation wrung from the heart of an honourable man. She bent her head to the ear of Palma, and whispered, 'Will you send a message to Emmanuel Lazarus?'

The eyes opened and looked dimly at her, but no answer came.

Lord Saltcombe lingered in the street. He would not leave the neighbourhood of the house. The night was cold, and the wind raw ; a fog blew up from the sea, and stole in filmy coils along the street, drifting past the lamps and forming halos about them. He walked faster, up and down, up and down, turning his eyes ever at the lighted window. The clock struck four—it struck five, and he was still there. Before dawn the cold became keener, eating into the marrow. Then the chimes of St. Andrew's played 'Home, sweet Home,' and as they played, against the lighted window appeared the shadow of a black cross.

Lord Saltcombe removed his hat, and stood with folded hands looking at the cross ; then up, with dim eyes, through the fog above.

CHAPTER XXXI.

A SPOKE IN THE WHEEL.

Mr. Rigsby had taken a handsome house for the winter at Stoke, above Devonport, or rather between Devonport and Plymouth. The house commanded a view over the entire harbour, with Maker Point and Mount Edgcumbe. A more beautiful bay is not to be found the world over. The hills are bold, some bare, others richly wooded; the creeks are numerous, the beautiful Hamoaze opening into the bay is like a hand, every finger of which is a lovely blue estuary, and this fair

hand is full of vessels. Far away to the head of the water rise the peaks of Dartmoor above rolling woods and hills, studded with white houses and grey church towers. Mr. Rigsby was not easily satisfied; he was determined to have a good house, and he got the best, with large gardens sloping down the hill, lawns, tennis-ground enclosed within yew hedges, and terraces with roses.

He had roughed it in Ceylon in old days ; the bungalow in which Dulcina had been brought up was plain, and slenderly furnished. In England Mr. Rigsby was exacting. Dulcina would be a duchess, and he must show the world that he had a fortune that allowed him to live like a prince. He bought carriages and horses, and engaged servants, put the men in the Rigsby livery of buff and blue, made his coachman powder his hair and sit on a hammer-cloth. He sent orders to town for pictures, and had the house put into the hands of a decorative adviser.

'I know nothing about art furniture,' he said. 'So long as I have a chair to sit on, it is all one to me what is the shape, but—one must be in fashion, or risk being thought a boor.'

He had his own rooms plainly furnished—a hard bed, and no carpets on the floors. 'I like to spit,' he said, 'and carpets get in the way of spitting.' He had his Cingalese manservant, who understood his wants, and none of the other men were allowed near him. He lived very much to himself, smoking and reading Indian papers in his snuggery, and it was with difficulty that he could be drawn from it to entertain guests in the drawing-room.

He was sitting in his room, with a fire in the grate, and his feet against the marble jambs, when he was told that a visitor was desirous of speaking to him on urgent business.

'Who is it ? a gentleman or a lady ? A gentleman ! Show him in here. Confound it all, can I not be left an hour in peace ? In the drawing-room, is he ? Has he not given you his card ? No ! Deuce take it, I suppose I must go in to him. Here, take off my smoking jacket, and help me into my coat. I can't go in my slippers. Give me my boots. What a life I lead here ? I wish I were back in Ceylon ! '

As soon as he was presentable Mr. Rigsby went to the drawing-room. He saw there a stoutly built man with grey black hair, and dark eyes like sloes. There was no mistaking his nationality. Nose and eyes and cheek-bones proclaimed it.

He was well dressed. As Mr. Rigsby entered he rose and bowed.

'I beg your pardon,' said Mr. Rigsby, with some stiffness, 'I did not learn your name. Perhaps my man forgot it, perhaps you did not give it. You said you had business with me.'

'My name is of little importance,' said the stranger. 'It is quite true that I have called on business. I have heard, sir, that you are desirous of furnishing this most charming residence with everything that taste and luxury demands. My name, sir, is Lazarus—Emmanuel Lazarus, of the "Golden Balls," Barbican. I happen to have, sir, a very choice collection of artistic odds and ends, which I offer at a ridiculously low price. I am a collector of objects of art and antiquity, and it is my pleasure to furnish gentlemen of taste and means with the best treasures of the past. I have also some very nice old Spanish lace, which your beautiful young lady might like to see. I got the spoils of several churches at a bargain, the lace is from the altars, and I shall be proud to think that one whom I hear on all sides spoken of as an Oriental star should wear it. Old china, sir! no man can call himself a gentleman, whatever his birth and fortune, or invite friends to his house without a blush, if he has not his cheffoniers and side-table and walls covered with old china. Old silver also, sir, is greatly in request. I happen to have some very choice apostle spoons. No one can hold up his head in society without at least a couple of apostle spoons in Dutch silver sugar basins.'

'Thank you,' said Mr. Rigsby; 'I understand none of these things. I have put myself into the hands of a decorator.'

'Would you mind telling me, sir, the style in which the decorator is going to do you up? Louis Quatorze, Queen Anne, Chippendale, or Victorian? Are you going to be painted over with cranes and sunflowers? I've known a lady dadoed round, with a skirting of Japanese rush mats, all gilt, and very effective it was. If you'll allow me to suggest you that, sir, you would find it neat and warm. I happen to have a quantity of these rush mats all plaited in different patterns. Or are you going into Chippendale, and have your legs curved, and turned fine, and fluted? I don't hold to having your legs made too spindly. There is a loss of strength. Still, fashion is for it. I have some of the very finest Chippendale ever seen in stock; I can give you legs that are in the first style, and yet

are not spindly. Or—if I may make so bold as to ask—are you going to be Rococo?'

Mr. Rigsby stared. 'I do not understand——'

'A combination of rock and shell. Are they going to encrust you with rockwork and shellwork, and scoop out curves in you and fill in with flowers, and not leave you a straight line anywhere, and gild you from top to toe? The effect is gorgeous rather than classic. The First Empire is a reaction against that, severe, subdued—nude. Are you going in for that? If so, I have some choice little articles, clocks and side-tables and mirrors.'

Mr. Rigsby stood up. 'Sir, I am very busy; I leave all this to the decorator. I am incompetent to judge for myself. One thing you may be quite sure of: I will never go in for the nude. The climate don't admit of it. It is different altogether in Ceylon. I wish you good morning.'

'Stay, stay!' exclaimed the Jew, alarmed at the prospect of losing his opportunity in his over-eagerness to deal. 'Might I ask one thing more, sir? I have matter of the utmost importance to communicate. I cannot speak of the matter in this room. I am afraid of being overheard. It is not about Louis Quatorze, or Rococo, or First Empire.'

'There is no one here. We are quite alone, but I cannot imagine you can have anything to communicate that will interest me. I have put myself into the hands of a decorator, and given him *carte blanche*.'

'If you wish it. Will you hear me patiently for five minutes?'

Mr. Rigsby looked at the French clock. It had stopped. He took out his watch. 'I can only spare you three. I am most busy.'

'I will crush all I have to say into three minutes. Only I entreat you, my dear sir, to have patience with me, and allow me fully to explain the circumstances to you. In your presence, sir, in the presence, sir, of a man of your colossal fortune, I feel myself so agitated, so unable to gather my thoughts, that——'

'I am ready to listen to you during three minutes. I cannot allow more. My time is of exceeding value, I am pressed with business which may not be postponed. I see by my watch that only two minutes remain.'

'I will make haste, sir, but the presence of a Goliath of wealth overawes me. I have heard, sir, of the immensity of

your fortune, and I know that such a fortune could not be accumulated without great genius.'

Mr. Rigsby spread his breast by putting his thumbs through his waistcoat armholes. Peacocks, when vain, spread their tails; men, when proud, their bosoms.

'I admit that I am not a fool, if that satisfies you,' said Mr. Rigsby, 'but please proceed to business.'

'You will excuse me when I say that your fortune, acquired by hard labour and racking of brain, must not be thrown away blindly.'

'Set your mind quite at ease, Mr. Lazarus; my property is safe, and its security in no way concerns you.'

'You must excuse me if I dispute this; I see you on the point of throwing everything away.'

Mr. Rigsby assumed a stare of disgust and indignation.

'You are presuming. One minute more.'

'I understand that you are about to see your most beautiful, talented, and fascinating daughter married to the Marquess of Saltcombe.'

Mr. Rigsby rose. 'Really, Mr. Lazarus, I must decline to have my private affairs discussed by you.'

'I am not discussing them, sir; I am here to warn you.'

'To warn me of what? of sitting on spindle-legged Chippendale? Five seconds more.'

'Of marrying your daughter to a bankrupt profligate!' exclaimed Lazarus, rising.

'What do you mean? The words are insulting.'

'The epithets describe him exactly. Bankrupt he and all his family are; and he is only seeking the hand of your daughter to save himself and his whole house from utter, irretrievable ruin.'

'Good God!' exclaimed the planter. 'What do you mean?'

'I mean what I say. If you want proof, I have it. I have it by me here.'

Mr. Rigsby burst out laughing. 'Preposterous! The Duke has an enormous fortune, to which mine is a fleabite. I have seen how he lives.'

'The Duke is over head and ears in debt. He cannot pay interest on his mortgages. He has borrowed money right and left, and lives from hand to mouth. In a month, I—that is, the creditors—will take steps to foreclose; it is because the Marquess and his family hope to stave off ruin with your money that they stoop to accept your daughter into the family.'

'Stoop! stoop to Dulcina!' exclaimed Mr. Rigsby. 'Come into my smoking-room. This matter must not be discussed here. Miss Rigsby, or Miss Stokes, or one of the flunkeys might be dropping in—visitors calling—Heaven knows what. Follow me into my study. I have plenty of time at my disposal. I have nothing to do, and will hear you patiently. Good Heavens! Bankrupt! Ruined! Dulcina snapped at for her money! Thunder and blazes! Follow me.'

He led the way into his smoking-room, which he called his study, though no books were in it.

'Excuse me,' he said, 'I cannot think in this coat. My ideas won't move in boots. Allow me to put on my smoking jacket and slippers; my time is at your disposal.'

'I have here,' said the Jew, taking a chair by the table—'I have in this little book a *précis* of the income and expenditure and debts of the family. I have got more; I have here a packet of notes of hand, and a couple of mortgages, one on Court Royal manor and estate, which will convince you that I am not exaggerating when I say that the family is on the verge of ruin. Please cast your eye over these accounts; they were extracted by a confidential agent from the books in the steward's office, without his knowledge. In love and war and business, everything is fair.'

Mr. Rigsby sat down. His face became mottled, he could not sit comfortably on his chair; he turned it, then turned it again. 'Good Heavens!' he said, 'who would have thought it? It is impossible.'

'It is true, absolutely true.'

Mr. Rigsby stood up and walked to the window, where he stood for some minutes drumming on the glass with his fingers.

'I was not told this,' he said.

'Of course you were kept in the dark.'

'I shall tie everything up to my daughter's sole use.'

'Then they will not say "Thank you" for your daughter. They only want her because they expect through her to get at your purse.'

Mr. Rigsby came back to the table, and took up the schedule of debts, bills, and mortgages.

'Some of these are for enormous sums, of old standing, never redeemed.'

'Never likely to be redeemed, unless you find the money.'

'But I cannot find the amount. I should sink everything.'

'This is the state of affairs; I have felt it my duty to in-

form you of it. If the young people love each other so dearly that your daughter is ready to make the sacrifice, then I have nothing to say against the marriage ; but I think it well that both she and you should be made aware of the character of the man to whom she is about to entrust the happiness of her life. I have shown you that there is reason to believe that the marriage is desired by the family for the sake of your money. You are not perhaps aware why it is that the Marquess has not been married already.'

'No, I do not know.'

'I will tell you. Because of a scandal. He ran away with a beautiful woman, the wife of a respectable man of business. The woman is now an actress. You have seen her, Palma Kaminska.

Mr. Rigsby looked at him with pale face and open mouth.

'He fell in love with her a few years ago, and carried her away with him to Sicily. After a while they parted, but whether the scandal has stood in the way of a woman of character accepting him as husband, or whether he has never ceased to love her, I cannot say. She disappeared for a while ; where she has been living, whether under his protection or not, I do not know. You saw her yesterday. You noticed his agitation when an accident happened to her.'

'Merciful Heaven!' exclaimed Mr. Rigsby, putting his hands to his brow, and leaning his elbows on the table. 'What a wicked world this is ! I wish I were back in Ceylon !'

'He visited the house where she lodged, after the accident. Let us hope it was only to say good-bye for ever, before marrying your daughter.'

'If this be true he never shall marry my daughter. Oh dear, oh dear ! What misery might have ensued had she become his—and this not have come out till after ! Poor Dulcina ! But—' he raised himself on one elbow—'I cannot understand your motive coming here and telling me this. What is the happiness of Dulcina to you ? What concern is it of yours whether I lose my fortune among titled adventurers ?'

'None at all,' answered the Jew drily.

'I don't believe a word about the actress,' exclaimed the planter desperately. 'Why should I not use my money, if I please, to extricate the estate ? It will come to my daughter in the end. I shall not lose my money. Whatever I do is for my child. As for this scandalous story, I don't and I won't believe it. I will ask Saltcombe the truth about it myself.'

'Do so ; he will not deny what occurred.'

'I should like to know, sir, what your motive is in coming here and troubling me with these stories. If you hold one or two of the mortgages you ought not to regret the chance of having them paid off. Why do you seek to set me against the Marquess?'

'The woman he ran away with was my wife.' When Lazarus said this he rose. 'Now you understand why I put a spoke in his wheel! Is he to be happy, released from his cares, and I to be miserable, weighed down with trouble? Is he to have a wife and home, and children on his knees, and I to have a cold and solitary hearth?' Lazarus stood in the door. 'I have said my say. Act as you think best for the happiness of your child.'

He bowed and left the room. Mr. Rigsby laid his brow on the table, groaned, and said, 'I wish I were back in Ceylon!'

CHAPTER XXXII.

A DROP OF COMFORT.

Mr. Rigsby started from his seat, threw on his overcoat, pulled on his boots, took his hat and stick, and sallied forth. He had a vague hope of coming to some decision if he walked. He could come to none seated in his snuggery. At one moment he flared up with anger and resentment, then he grew cold with apprehension. How would his dear Dulcina bear to be parted from the Marquess with whom she was so much in love? It would break her heart, which was as frail as her constitution. It would bring on an attack of jaundice. Strong emotion, a great shock, congested the liver ; the breaking off of her engagement would certainly congest her liver. Would it be wise to prepare her for the news with calomel? He would consult a doctor. Podophyllin! since he had come to England he had been told that podophyllin touched the liver, and was milder than calomel! He did not believe in podophyllin. He knew better ; as an old Indian he ought to know what the liver is, and what touches it. No podophyllin for him ; no, thank you. He had heard of a spectre who, when fired at,

opened his hand and showed the bullets that had been innocuously discharged at him. His liver would, so to speak, open its hand and scoffingly roll back the podophyllin pills shot at it. But before calomel its powers would quail, it would shake in its shoes and beat a retreat. Still podophyllin might answer for Dulcina, whose liver was not as enlarged as his own. He would consult a doctor.

So he swung his stick and marched into Plymouth. 'Good Heavens!' he muttered. 'The rascal about to take my daughter for her money and then cast her aside, treat her with indifference and insult! I won't have it.'

When he came to the bridge leading to Plymouth, and halted to change a sovereign to pay the halfpenny toll, he was confronted by a gentleman in a light grey suit, with a white hat.

'Bless my soul!' exclaimed the gentleman, 'Rigsby! you here? Let me lend you a halfpenny for old lang syne.'

Rigsby stared. 'What, Captain Ottley! Never! Very glad to see you.'

'A little louder, I am deaf of an ear, this confounded relaxing climate. The bands always find a difficulty with their drums, the parchment becomes limp in the Devonshire damp; it is ditto with the drums of my ears. You must thump to be heard.'

'Come on the Hoe,' said Mr. Rigsby. 'It is a pleasure to meet an old Indian. So well preserved, too! You look as young as ever.'

'Spirits does it,' answered Captain Ottley. 'I mean natural spirits. I have a cheerful disposition, which even the vapour-bath atmosphere of Devon don't damp. Take my arm, old boy. Lord bless me! time flies! It seems only the other day we met, and it must be five years ago. Brown and tanned you are with Oriental suns. Never mind, look at me. Autumn roses come blooming in my cheeks. This Devonshire climate is like a bath in Jordan. You go in sunburnt with all the blazes of India, and your flesh comes out as the flesh of a little child.'

'What are you doing here?' asked Mr. Rigsby.

'Doing! doing nothing. Nobody ever does anything but talk in this enervating Devonshire climate. It relaxes everything, the moral stamina and the tongue. I eat lotus. I have come like Ulysses to the land of the lotus-eaters, where, according to the Laureate, it always seems afternoon. I lounge about

on the seats of the Hoe, looking out at the Breakwater; it always seems after dinner here.'

'Do you know many people?' asked the planter.

'Heaps—women mostly. They swarm here. Here in Plymouth there are very few others to know. You see their husbands and brothers are away at sea, or in the army abroad, and the place simply swarms with women.'

'Are you married?'

'Oh, dear me, no! I wouldn't be so well preserved if I were. I can't afford it. Besides, the climate is against it. You want more ozone in the air to stimulate the resolution to proposing point.'

'I should like to know your opinion upon podophyllin.'

'I beg your pardon.'

'Podophyllin,' shouted Rigsby; he had lowered his voice to a confidential tone, forgetful of his friend's infirmity.

Captain Ottley stood still, put the silver head of his cane to his mouth, which he pursed, contracted his brows, and then shook his head. 'I don't think much of it,' he said. 'I've tried it; but I don't give my faith to it. Half-measures don't suit us old Indians. Give me calomel.'

'Calomel—ah!' The sun came out on both their faces, they laughed like children. 'Calomel, old boy!'

'Blue pill, old fellow, shake hands.' In their mutual enthusiasm they clasped fists.

'But it may do for women?' suggested Rigsby.

'*Virginibus puerisque*, yes,' answered Captain Ottley. 'Let us sit down here. One's limbs fail one in this damned Devonshire air.'

'Have you been long here?'

'Four or five years soaking in this steam, and expanding. It suits us Indians. We come here dry and shrivelled, and swell, taking in moisture at every pore.'

'Then you know about the country people, the nobility and so on?'

'Of course I do. I know everything about everybody.'

'Do you know the Kingsbridge family?'

'I can't say I do. I know of them; no one meets them. I have a grievance. There was a superb ball at Court Royal the other day, and a special train full of officers went down. I was not invited. A plague upon them, say I. Why was not I invited? I am on half pay, was that the reason? I hear it was a splendid affair.'

'I was there,' said Mr. Rigsby. 'So was my daughter, Dulcina. Did you not see our names in the paper?'

'I may have done so, but did not notice them. Mine was not there, and that stirred my bile. Talking of bile, what do you drink, Rigsby?'

'I have been so long out of England that I cannot satiate myself on bottled ale.'

'You must not do it. Beer is bilious; fatal in this confounded climate, where the liver simply goes to sleep. You have to goad it to do its work. It is like Pickwick's fat boy. I don't approve of claret. Sherry is poison. Whisky and water is what I recommend.'

'We must talk of something else,' said the planter.

'Well, I suppose you are right, but somehow the liver is common ground on which all old Indians meet for a cosy gossip; old asperities are rubbed off, old grudges forgotten. It is a sort of bond, binding us into brotherhood. Tear us away to other scenes and pastures new, sweep us along in the eddy of politics, or any other eddy you like to mention, we always come back to liver, touch ground there, and are thankful. We may differ in politics, religion, in pursuits, we are one in liver.'

'I should like a word with you in the strictest confidence.'

'Certainly, no one is here to overhear us. Remember; let whisky and water be your drink—cold, and no sugar.'

Mr. Rigsby looked about him; no one was within earshot. 'We must not sit longer here,' he said, 'it is chilly; let us stroll up and down, and I will speak to you about my affairs, with the understanding that it goes no further.'

'Good Heavens!' gasped Captain Ottley. 'Not money! Don't say you want to borrow money. My liver will not stand it. Anything but that!'

'I am abundantly well off,' said the planter. 'I am, I may say, in affluent circumstances. It is precisely my wealth which has drawn me into an affair from which I do not see my way out. By some fatality I have been brought into rather intimate relations with the Duke of Kingsbridge and his family.'

'Does he want to borrow money? I have heard that his head is under water.'

'I knew his brother, Lord Edward Eveleigh, at college. I happened to be in Somersetshire, at Glastonbury, and I called on him. He and Lady Elizabeth were very kind, they invited me and my daughter to their house, and there we met Lord Saltcombe, the eldest—no, the only son of the Duke. He

seemed to take a fancy to my child, and she, poor thing, completely lost her heart to him. Of course I gave my consent. I was proud to think that my Dulcina would be a marchioness, and eventually a duchess. One loves title; it is born in one, I suppose; it is a weakness, but it is a weakness common to the whole human race.'

'I congratulate you with all my heart. What can a father desire for his daughter better than the eight strawberry leaves?'

'But—I consented in all simplicity, believing that a ducal coronet was a rock on which sure prosperity could be built, and now I find——' He sighed, took off his hat, brushed his brow, and said, 'My dear Ottley, for God's sake tell me the truth about the family. Give me your advice. I am so perplexed, I do not know what to do.'

'What am I to tell you? I have not my Peerage with me. I have it at home, and will lend it you, or we will put our heads together over it. The Marquess is here, in Plymouth, at the "Royal."'

'I know that. I want to know nothing that the Peerage can tell me. I have learned that by heart. I want to know about their circumstances.'

'Oh, they are dipped, but so is every respectable old family. Have you ever been at Saint Jean de Luz? There the bathers spend hours in the water, only their heads emerging, and take their meals and their naps bathing. I have seen the whole bay full of heads, and heads only. It is so with all the landed gentry—with most families of distinction—they are all under water, only their heads out, but they do not drown.'

'The Kingsbridge family are utterly ruined.'

'I do not believe that. It takes gigantic efforts to ruin a duke. The great nobility stick in the social jaw in spite of ache and decay; they are fast by four or five fangs. As for you or me, we are only one-fang people, out, and our places taken by porcelain imitations, and no one cares. But your four and five-fanged people are different.'

'You do not think the Duke ruined?'

'I know nothing about him, more than that he lives quietly, never goes to town, and does good on all sides.'

'You think that he is not in overwhelming difficulties?'

'I should not suppose so, but I cannot tell.'

'There is one thing more. What do you know about the Marquess of Saltcombe, who is engaged to my daughter?'

'Not much either; of late nothing at all.'

'Of late? Did you hear much of him formerly?'

'I heard something.'

'What was it? I want to know.'

'Young men will be young men,' said Captain Ottley. 'It is not till their livers have grown that they become sedate and reliable. You may depend upon it, my dear old fellow, the liver is the fly-wheel of the system.'

'My daughter is engaged to the Marquess. I have heard a story about him which has made me very uneasy.'

'Fiddlesticks! I tell you what it is, Rigsby: this cursed depressing Devonshire climate has begun to act on your liver and make it torpid. Why, bless my soul! any man out of Devonshire would be shrieking with delight at the prospect of marrying his daughter to a marquess, and here you are looking as blue over it as a calomel pill.'

'My daughter's happiness is dearer to me than life. Unless I am assured that she will be treated with kindness and respect, be made much of and valued, I shall not consent to the union. What I have heard affects the Marquess's moral character.'

'I heard something about him when first I came to Plymouth. He had been wild and extravagant, and had run away with a Jewess.'

'The wife of another.'

'Yes, I remember that. But all that is past, and he has been sober since; not a scandal about him for many years. Besides, consider the temptations which beset a young man here, and that young man the heir to a dukedom. Unless he had a very old head on young shoulders he would be certain to get into a scrape. You must not make too much of this old scandal. It is with the dead. I dare say there are incidents in your past which you are thankful are buried.'

'I do not know any,' said Mr. Rigsby. 'I have always been steady. You see I have made a fortune. That is the seal of approval Heaven has set on my conduct. Always respectable, always. That is why I have no sympathy with a man who has sown his wild oats. I never sowed anything but coffee.'

'How have you come to hear this now?'

Mr. Rigsby told his friend of the visit of Lazarus.

'Lazarus,' exclaimed Captain Ottley, and pulled a long face. 'Confound the man, he has his fingers in every pie and pocket. He has even dipped into mine.'

'What is to be done?' asked Mr. Rigsby.

'Nothing,' answered Captain Ottley. 'Let matters take their course. Things are never as black as they are painted. The Jew exaggerated the financial condition of the family. He does not want to have the mortgage paid because the investment is too profitable for him to care to lose it. Do not excite yourself about the Marquess, either. I have always heard that he is a man of honour, and if he did transgress once, it was for the only and the last time.'

The Captain succeeded in calming Rigsby's agitation. The planter began to hope that matters had been presented to him in a worse aspect than they really were. He was resolved to question Lord Saltcombe on them, on both, and to hear the truth from him. The Marquess was expected to dinner that evening. Scarce a day passed without his visiting the house, and driving or walking with his betrothed. This day he did not call, nor did he appear at dinner. Mr. Rigsby became uneasy. He rose early from his wine, lit a cigar, and walked into Plymouth to inquire after the Marquess.

He was told that Lord Saltcombe was at home, but not well, and desired that he might not be disturbed. Mr. Rigsby was dissatisfied with the answer. He sent up his name, and asked if he might see the Marquess for a moment. Then only was he shown to his room. He found him seated in his arm-chair, without a light.

'Shall I bring candles, my lord?' asked the servant.

'Thank you.—Sit down, Mr. Rigsby. I am out of sorts.'

When the candles came in, Rigsby saw that his face was deadly pale, his eyes sunken and bright.

'You desired to see me particularly?' he asked.

'Yes; but you seem hardly well enough for what I wish to discuss.'

'I also wanted to see you. I must speak openly with you,' said the Marquess.

'My dear Saltcombe,' said Mr. Rigsby, 'I am a blunt man, and I ask questions in a blunt way. You must excuse me.'

The Marquess bowed.

'You must understand that what I live for is the happiness of my daughter. I have toiled for her. My fortune is hers, and I am desirous that it should be secured to her, to be inalienably hers. Again, I would not have her marry anyone, however high his position in the social scale, unless I were sure that he would love her.'

'Do not distress yourself,' said the Marquess, quietly. 'I will spare you the pain of asking questions. You are quite right in desiring to secure the happiness of your daughter. I obeyed the wishes of my family, and proposed to Miss Rigsby, satisfied in my mind that, having taken on me sacred responsibilities, I should honourably fulfil them. Of this you may be certain: if Miss Rigsby become my wife, never will I show her the slightest want of courtesy and deference.'

'She must have more than that. Do you love her?'

'Mr. Rigsby,' said the Marquess, 'I do not press my pretensions to your daughter's hand. I tell you that I am resolved to do my duty; there is no other living woman who has any share in my affections, always excepting my sister.'

The planter was uneasy. He did not know how to approach the delicate questions he wanted to put. He fumbled with his hat and grew dark red in the face.

'I beg your pardon, Saltcombe,' he said, 'if I touch on subjects that are tender. I am very much shocked—very, so is Dulcina, by the dreadful incident at the theatre. I thought at the time you seemed overcome. I was not then aware of the—of the——'

Lord Saltcombe could hardly become paler than he was before, but the shadows in his face became deeper. He rose from his chair, and said with the greatest composure, 'Mr. Rigsby, I will not require you to continue. If you doubt me, we had better part. I am returning to Court Royal. Pray excuse the abruptness of my departure to Miss Rigsby and Miss Stokes. I offer them the humblest apologies.'

Mr. Rigsby could hardly believe his ears. He was still sitting. He got up without his hat, then stooped, picked it up, let it fall, and picked it up again. Instead of taking his future son-in-law to task, he was being shown the door with cool politeness. The Marquess was proud and dignified; he shook Dulcina off as if she were not worth having. Mr. Rigsby had not intended to quarrel with the Marquess, he had desired the allaying of his own anxieties. A word of regret for past follies, an assurance that the fortunes of the family were not completely wrecked, would have sufficed. He believed that Dulcina was so much in love with Lord Saltcombe that a disappointment would half kill her. He was ready to meet the Marquess halfway, to accept an assurance of repentance, and to pay off one or two of the mortgages at once, and secure the rest of his property to his daughter.

But Lord Saltcombe would make no advance. He took umbrage at the implied suspicions. Father and daughter must accept him on his own terms, or not at all.

'Am I to understand,' said he, 'that you refuse to give me any explanations as to your conduct with regard to that actress, and to relieve my mind with reference to the embarrassments of the Duke?'

Lord Saltcombe bowed.

'Then I suppose your engagement to my daughter is at an end?'

'I allow no liberties to be taken with me,' said Lord Saltcombe. 'I have rung for a cab.'

When Mr. Rigsby was out of the hotel, driving home to Stoke, 'Lord bless me!' he exclaimed, 'how testy these aristocrats are! Impracticable people. Time the country were rid of them. I wish I were back in Ceylon!'

CHAPTER XXXIII.

BROKEN OFF.

On reaching home, Mr. Rigsby told his man to ask Miss Stokes to do him the civility of speaking with him in the study.

Miss Stokes came sailing in with great dignity, wondering what Mr. Rigsby could want to say to her at that time of the evening in private. Sisters-in-law cannot be kept for ever in the cold, she argued with herself.

'Would you mind shutting the door behind you?' asked Mr. Rigsby, as Miss Stokes had left it modestly ajar, and stood near it herself.

'Please come nearer. I have something I want very particularly to say to you.'

'I am at your service, James,' said Miss Stokes, shutting the door and advancing one step.

'My dear Eliza,' began the planter, standing on the hearth with his back to the fire, 'the matter I wish to speak to you upon is a delicate one; between you and me, a very delicate one.'

'Indeed, James!'

'I have been a widower for some years.'

'Oh, James, you have, you have!'

'And I have had only my daughter to solace me in my loneliness. And now that daughter——'

'Is about to be translated to a loftier sphere.'

'In matters of the heart, Eliza—in matters of the heart—I mean—I am confused. I have had much to think of. I did not intend to speak now, but I thought it best to do so to-night instead of delaying longer.' Miss Stokes looked down. 'Won't you take a chair, my dear Eliza?' She gracefully sank into one near the table. 'You have been so good and devoted to Dulcina, my dear Eliza, that I have considered I could not do better than take you—ahem!—take you——'

'Oh, James! I never, never dreamed of the happiness.'

'Take you into confidence before breaking the news to Dulcina. How she will bear it I tremble to think.'

'Do not tremble, dear James. She is cordially attached to me, I may say she regards me—she has regarded me, though our respective ages hardly admit it, as a second mother.'

'Then I can trust you to break the painful news to her, can I not?'

'Not painful—do not say painful, James.'

'Indeed, I hope and trust it will not be painful, but I greatly fear. Such deception, such heartlessness.'

'What deception? What heartlessness, James? Not on my side; I have been all frankness—too much heart.'

'I have been horribly deceived. It is all up with the engagement.'

'Up! which engagement?'

'Which? There has been only one. Dulcina must forget Lord Saltcombe.'

'What—what?' exclaimed Miss Stokes, pushing her chair back and looking blank. 'I thought, James—but never mind what I thought.'

'If you thought anything else you thought wrong,' said he. 'It is all up with the engagement. We have been grossly imposed upon. The Marquess was hunting Dulcina for her money; the family of the Duke are in desperate straits, and at any moment the creditors may be down on them, turn them out of Court Royal, and sell house and lands.'

Miss Stokes stared.

'They were reckoning on paying their debts with my money—a pack of coroneted beggars! Lord Saltcombe does not care a snap of the fingers for Dulcina—he wanted only her money,

and then when he had got that he would have deserted her. Bless my soul! Did I plant coffee, and slave for all these years away from my native land, sacrificing my life and disorganising my liver, to find money for a parcel of needy noblemen?' Am I to send my dear Dulcina among wolves, who will tear from her the flesh and leave only the bones?'

'This is not possible, James.'

'It not only is possible, but it is so. I charged Lord Saltcombe with the beggarly trick to his face, and he was unable to answer me. He slunk from my presence like a whipped dog. Now, Eliza, how do you think my darling will bear the disappointment?'

'My dear James, you need not fear. That sweet Dulcina possesses so sound a judgment and so cool a head that I am sure, when all the circumstances have been placed before her, she will bear the loss like a martyr.'

'My poor dear! like a martyr. O my child! my child!'

'Do not be uneasy, James. I exercise great influence over Dulcina. I will break to her the news you have so graciously favoured me with. Perhaps you will talk to her yourself about it to-morrow, after breakfast.'

'I fear it will be a cruel disappointment.'

'Disappointments meet us poor women wherever we tread,' said Miss Stokes, with a sigh.

Next day at breakfast Mr. Rigsby was uncomfortable. He had not slept much, troubled with the thought of the distressing duty awaiting execution. At breakfast he crumbled his toast, upset his egg, and dawdled over his coffee. Dulcina looked limp and lachrymose.

When breakfast was over Miss Stokes went into the conservatory, so as to be out of hearing, yet near at hand. The time had arrived for the dreaded disclosure. How much had Miss Stokes already told Dulcina? The father wished he knew.

'Come and sit by me on the sofa, darling child,' he said. 'You are not looking well, I am sure you have been suffering. And now I have to increase your trouble by speaking on a most unsatisfactory subject.' He looked round at his daughter. Her face expressed no emotion. 'I am not a father who would stand in the way if his child desired something very much; the happiness of you, Dulcina, is paramount to every consideration. I do not know to what extent your affections have been engaged, whether your heart would break should

Lord Saltcombe not—not—excuse the expression—come to the scratch. I have favoured your acquaintance with him because I have believed him an admirable match. But, my dear, all is not gold that glitters. It is, as the Latin grammar tells us, human to err. I have learned circumstances which have altered my view of Lord Saltcombe's character, and made me doubt whether the engagement is to your advantage. I am a plain business man, and I look to the business side of everything. I have made inquiries, and my inquiries have dissatisfied me. The connection with the Kingsbridge family, the title, the position, that seemed so splendid that I was dazzled. But there are spots in the sun, craters in the moon, blots on ducal escutcheons.'

Miss Rigsby became uneasy; she looked at her father, then at the breakfast-table, then on the floor.

'I have learned, to my surprise, that the Kingsbridge family are bankrupt; they are living on the very verge of ruin. Only the hesitation of their creditors saves from a fall which will be a scandal throughout England.'

'Papa! I cannot think it.'

'I assure you, my darling, it is true. I have seen the list of mortgages. I know precisely the condition of their affairs. They are in the hands of the Jews. You saw the splendour in which they live. That is all paid for out of other people's money They put on a glittering mask to cover ruin. The Marquess is penniless. If you marry him he will look to you for his pocket-money, for cigars, and tailor's bill—go to you whenever he wants a new pair of boots or a handkerchief. It is true you will receive his title, but in return you will maintain him like a poor relation.'

Mr. Rigsby kept his eyes fixed on his daughter whilst he spoke. He was afraid of her fainting, and he was ready to call Miss Stokes to his aid. But Dulcina listened to him with composure; she bit her lip and frowned, and ripped the binding off a cushion on the sofa, but said nothing.

'A handsome sum which I was prepared to pay over on your marriage would have gone at once to the Jews, to stop their greedy jaws and stave off the fall of the house. The Duke, the Marquess, Lord Ronald, and Lord Edward are calculating on my death, when they may use up the whole of my—that is, your fortune in washing clean the family estates. What those estates are likely to be worth in a few years, with bad seasons, and American corn and frozen meat coming in on

all sides, I cannot say. I suppose about two per cent. You have now five or six on your capital. If your money goes into the land you are likely to lose half your income.'

He was silent. Presently Miss Rigsby said, 'Did they tell you this?'

'Bless my soul, no! The fine thing is that they are all so cavalier in their aristocratic ideas, that they regard the marriage of Saltcombe with you as a great condescension on their part. They will pocket your money and tolerate you.

'Then they wanted to swindle us?' said Dulcina.

'I wouldn't call it exactly a swindle. I believe they are far too grand to go into accounts. I dare say they do not know their desperate situation, but have a vague idea that they must have money to make them comfortable, and as you have money they will take you for the sake of your gold.'

Dulcina's lips became pasty. She drew them together, and her hard eyes glittered like steel beads in the sun.

'Lord Saltcombe has never shown me much love. He has been civil, that is all. But Aunt Eliza said that in high society great people loved stiffly. It was against etiquette to be ardent.'

'Lord Saltcombe has not loved you. I asked him point blank if he did, only last night, and he could not say he did.'

'Lord Saltcombe has not loved me!' exclaimed Dulcina, with a vicious flash in her face. 'Do you mean to tell me he has not cared for *me*—that he has not admired *me*—that he has not courted *me*—that he has been peering into my pocket instead of my face all this while, thinking of my money, not of myself?'

'It is so.'

'Then I will have nothing to do with him.' Instead of Dulcina fainting the tears sprang to her eyes, tears of offended vanity, not of pain. 'I'll have it out with Aunt Eliza, I will; she vowed he was frantic with love, and hardly knew how to control his passion. Oh, what a liar she is!'

CHAPTER XXXIV.

INCURABLES.

At Court Royal everything had settled down to the ordinary routine after the Rigsbys had gone. The Duke was glad that the stir was over, he liked to be quiet. Lord Edward had returned to his living in Somersetshire, to relieve the exemplary curate in the labour of blowing bubbles, and insisting on the *via media* as the way of salvation. Lord Ronald resumed his early walks and his simple amusements. He had a turning lathe at which he took exercise on rainy days, and turned out hideous wooden candlesticks and boxes covered with spirals. Of late he had taken to turning flower-pot stands for all his friends, stands that started and split and had to be thrown away after having been in use a week. His grandest achievement was hat-stands, frightful objects that stood six feet high, and bristled with sticks ending in knobs. These hat-stands were to be seen and were sold at all bazaars in the neighbourhood, and were bought by people out of consideration for the General—it would hurt his feelings, it was thought, if his hat-stands remained undisposed of. Every door leading to the open air in Court Royal, every bedroom, was provided with one of these erections. In the rooms they were serviceable, he argued, for ladies to hang their gowns on, for gentlemen to suspend their coats.

Lady Grace had one, of course, in her room, and used it with great conscientiousness. 'It is not pretty,' she said to Lucy, 'but it is well-intentioned. It must be good—dear Uncle Roland made it. Things get rather dusty on it though.'

'Do you not think, dear, that if chintz were hung round it like a tent, the ugliness might be disguised, and the dust kept off?'

Acting on Lucy's suggestion the hat-stand was enclosed in a structure designed and executed for it by the General himself, who turned the head and turned the foot, and tacked the chintz on it himself. Then Lady Grace took his grey head between her hands and kissed both his cheeks.

'That,' said Lord Ronald, 'is over-payment.'

Lord Ronald was vigorously engaged at his lathe turning two

such hat and cloak stands out of rosewood, as a present for his nephew on his marriage. Each required twelve knobs for the bristles and four knobs for the feet, and a big knob for the top, seventeen knobs in all; two stands, therefore, demanded thirty-four knobs. Lord Ronald had turned nineteen, which were ranged on the floor in strict order like cannon balls; he was engaged on knob number twenty when he heard a tap at the door, and, before he could answer, in came Mr. Worthivale, hot and frightened looking.

'What is the matter, Worthivale? Is Court Royal a-fire?'

'Oh, my Lord, what is to be done? We are in a worse predicament than ever.'

'It would be difficult to reach that.'

'Really,' exclaimed the excited steward, 'I am driven wild. Has any news come from the Marquess? When will the marriage take place?'

'I do not think the day is fixed.'

'Has he written?'

'He wrote once after reaching Plymouth. I have not seen the Duke this morning, so I cannot say whether his Grace has received a letter to-day. It is all right, don't alarm yourself. The wedding must not be pressed on too hastily. My niece has had a note or two from Miss Rigsby, but they contained no news.'

'I wish the wedding were to take place at once. I do not see how we are to hold on much longer without it.'

'What is the matter now?'

'The creditors and mortgagees are unreasonable. The Court Royal and Kingsbridge mortgages held by Mr. Emmanuel are called in. He will file a bill against us. We cannot possibly meet the call. It is as much as we can do to meet current expenses. Where are we to raise a penny?' Bless my heart,' said the steward, throwing himself into a chair, 'here we were so happy and content, with the prospect before us of getting everything squared at our leisure, the Marquess marrying, and the more pressing calls stilled, when down on our heads comes this thunderbolt. File a bill against us in Chancery! Merciful heavens! What is the world coming to, with Radicalism, and democracy, and socialism, and American competition, cutting the throats of our farmers, and Fenian plots, and Nihilist desperadoes—and actually a request from Farmer Thomas to build him a silo that will contain sixty tons of ensilage. Why, my lord, it can't be done under three

to four hundred pounds, even if we use galvanised iron for the roof. Where are the four hundred pounds to come from at the present moment, I should like to know? I have said we will think of it after the Marquess is married.'

'Who has threatened a bill in Chancery?'

'Crudge—Crudge, solicitor. He acts, apparently, for all those holding our mortgages. It is a plot, a wicked plot as desperate as any devised by Fenians.'

'Do not alarm yourself, Worthivale. The people have heard that Saltcombe is going to be married, and they are putting in their claims so as to be sure of their money.'

'But we must pay. The time is limited—three months—six months. Before a certain day the money must be forthcoming.'

'Well, Saltcombe will be married before that, and then he can easily get help from old Rigsby. There is no occasion for alarm. For Heaven's sake don't rush in on the Duke in the way you tumbled in upon me. Don't frighten him. He has no idea of the state of affairs. He is under the impression that a great deal of money has been saved by the quiet life we have been leading here for the last seven or eight years.'

'No money whatever has been saved. Before that the family was in a galloping consumption, now it is suffering from slow paralysis. When the Duke went to town every year the outlay was enormous, and debts accumulated annually at a rate that makes my head spin. Now we live up to our income—that is, to an income unburdened on every shoulder and joint of the spine. There is nothing saved. You cannot save on a deficit.'

'Well, whatever you do, take care not to trouble his Grace. He cannot bear it.'

'But, my lord, what am I to do?'

'Nothing; wait, and keep your counsel. Let the marriage take place, and all will be right. I'll manage matters with Mr. Rigsby.'

'But,' said the steward—'you will excuse the question—does Mr. Rigsby know the state of affairs?'

'I believe a word was said about some money being forthcoming at the marriage. I can't say that he was told everything. I did not have much talk with him. He saw a good deal of the Duke, but then the Duke knows nothing about this unfortunate matter. Leave the affair to arrange itself. If you like I will write to Saltcombe to press on the marriage.'

The confidence of the General partly reassured Mr. Worthivale.

'You think, then, that we need not be anxious?'

'Not in the least. I will manage matters with Rigsby. The old fellow will be flattered and proud to let us have the money. What are the mortgages called in?'

'All—all without exception. What can have taken the people I cannot conceive; what can they all want their money for simultaneously? It looks like a plot. If only two or three had given notice I should not have minded, but all—and all together! I cannot get over it. And Crudge acting for the lot—that is strange, is it not?'

'Well, never mind,' answered the General; 'we know the worst. It is best to swallow a pill whole, not to take it in bits.'

'But what is the sum to be paid over with Miss Rigsby? Will it suffice?'

'No matter if it does not. It will stop a gap. I tell you the old fellow will be pleased to be asked to let us have the money we want. Those sort of people are flattered by having favours asked of them. Besides, it will be for his own daughter. He cannot refuse. I will make all right with him.'

'If I may offer a suggestion, my lord, I would propose that you should see Mr. Rigsby at once. It is true we have been remiss about the payment of interest on the mortgages, and that may have frightened the holders. If we could pay off one or two at once it might allay the alarm of the rest, and they could be brought to withdraw their demands.'

'There is three months' grace,' said Lord Ronald—'plenty of time. Put the matter in the hands of our solicitor, let him write to this Crudge.'

'No solicitor in the world can save us. We must have money.'

'It really is too bad!' exclaimed Lord Ronald, losing his temper. 'It is your fault, Worthivale. You should not have allowed things to come to this pass. You have had the management of the estates; they are extensive. You should have drawn the purse-strings tighter.'

'My lord,' said the steward, hurt, 'I beg you to remember that I have preached retrenchment to deaf ears.'

'We have retrenched. We no longer go to town.'

'That was not enough.'

'Good Heaven! What would you have had us do, then?'

'Could not his Grace have gone abroad and shut up the Court?'

'Gone abroad!—to Boulogne, and herded with all the clipped and pinched wretches who hover there, like the spirits on the banks of Lethe, unable to come over because short of an obolus. No, thank you. There are limits below which we cannot descend.'

'What is to be done? Nothing can be done now. It is too late. Some years ago—perhaps. Now all is hopeless.'

'This is rank nonsense. Mr. Rigsby is rolling in money.'

'But can we be sure of getting him to apply it to our necessity?'

'Of course we can. I know we can.'

'What is he worth? We want a very large sum.'

'I do not know his income. Be at ease. He has plenty.'

Mr. Worthivale put his hands to his head. 'If it were not wicked and cowardly,' he said, 'I would blow out my brains.'

'If there is immediate pressure,' said the General, 'I will write to Edward—to Lord Edward; he is canon and archdeacon, and proctor in Convocation, and enjoys a fat rectory. I have no doubt he will help.'

'He has helped us already.'

'When? How?'

'Over and over again, but he wished me not to mention it to any of the family.'

'Bless my soul!' exclaimed Lord Ronald, 'I had no idea of that. Can I sell my interest in anything—my annuity?'

'If you sell your annuity, my lord, it must be paid, and now it is not.'

'I can sell my half-pay of General.'

'A drop into a bottomless gulf.'

'Then we must wait in patience for the marriage-bells. Now—not another word. I am going to the Duke.'

The steward sighed and withdrew.

'Stay a moment,' called the General as he was passing through the door. 'I hope, I trust, not a word of this has reached the ears of Lady Grace. I do suppose that you have not spoken of these painful matters to Lucy.'

'She does know something,' said Mr. Worthivale.

'Who? Lucy or Grace?'

'Lucy has been told that no unnecessary expense must be incurred. Remember she manages the housekeeping, and has the accounts in her charge. But, as she says, it is impossible

to keep down the enormous outlay. The servants think it their duty to blaze abroad the splendour of the house by lavish waste. The requirements of the establishment are very great.'

'I do hope Lucy will not by hint even let Grace suppose that there is trouble in the air.'

'Rely on her.'

'Then no one need know of this confounded worry except myself and Saltcombe. There, there, be of good cheer, the cloud is passing.'

Lord Ronald went to the Duke's apartments. He found his brother disturbed, his face was wanting in its wonted serenity.

'Ronald,' said the Duke, 'no letter again this morning from that provoking boy. I cannot understand it. In my day no son would have dreamed of leaving his father without notice of his proceedings. Can it be that love has turned his head? If so, the sooner he is married and brought to a sober mind and sense of his obligations, the better.'

'You see, brother,' said the General, 'ladies are exacting. No doubt Miss Dulcina is not happy without Herbert about her, and love-making is one of the labours of Hercules. When he comes home he is fagged, and fain to throw himself in a chair and go to sleep. Take my word for it—that is it. Miss Rigsby has only written twice to Grace, once a line of thanks for her reception here, the other a mere half-page of nothing, that took her one minute by the clock to write.'

'Nothing can excuse neglect of duty to a parent,' said the Duke. 'When I was young I was taught to discharge duty first, and take pleasure after. The spirit of this age is other; duties are blown away as feathered seeds, and only pleasure is regarded. I thought better of Herbert.'

'My dear Duke, you must excuse him. Love-making demoralises a man. It is like an election, it upsets everything. No doubt, now that Saltcombe has emerged from his chrysalis, he is flying about.'

'It would not take him ten minutes to write me a line. I am not exacting. I do not require four sides crossed, but I expect the recognition of what is due from a son to a father. I am put out.'

Lord Ronald had nothing to say to this.

'Hitherto,' continued the Duke, 'I have had no reason to complain of Herbert; he has been a respectful, obedient son. He was extravagant some years ago, and I have no doubt

spent more money than was judicious, but it runs in the family. I was extravagant at one time; my father—as you may remember, Ronald—never stopped to consider what a thing cost if it took his fancy; and my grandfather went to extremes in munificence. I should have been pained to see a mean, calculating spirit in Herbert. A gentleman must be open-handed.'

'He has lived too quietly for some years. I am glad to see our comet run into sunlight again.'

'Yes. Because I am too poorly to take my proper place in society, that is no reason why Saltcombe should live as a hermit. I shall insist, when he is married, on his being in town for the season.'

'His wife will take care of that.'

'I trust she will. I have been considering that he must have a residence of his own.'

'Will he not live here?'

'Certainly not. I should like it, but it would hardly do. The Marquess and Marchioness must have their own country house, with no divided authority in it. I would not have Grace the guest of my daughter-in-law, nor my daughter-in-law the guest of Grace in Court Royal. No, Ronald, I have been thinking of Fowelscombe. The house is out of repair, but it is a fine place. The grounds are delightful, that glorious drive down through an avenue of beeches for over a mile, and then the charming old house below, nestling among trees—what can be more suitable for the young couple? The house has been uninhabited for so long, and the grounds so neglected, that it will want a great deal doing to it. Still, some ten thousand pounds spent judiciously would make it comfortable.'

'I am sure that Saltcombe would not wish it.'

'Ronald,' said the Duke, with some indignation, 'unless the poisonous spirit of the age has infected Saltcombe more deeply than I anticipate, he will approve of whatever I ordain. I have written to an architect to examine and report on the condition of Fowelscombe, and I have requested a distinguished landscape gardener to look over the grounds and suggest improvements.'

'But—my dear Duke.'

'There is no *but* in the case—that is, no but is admissible. I wish it. That suffices.'

Lord Ronald looked down at his boots.

'There is another thing,' continued the Duke, 'I wished to consult you about. I hear that the Revelstoke estates of the Stretchleighs are to be sold. Our great-grandmother was a Stretchleigh, and it is unendurable to me to think that some brewer, or builder, or successful army tailor should come down and buy the property, and inhabit the house once the home of gentlemen. I am thinking of buying it.'

'Merciful powers!' exclaimed Lord Ronald.

'Why do you exclaim in this way? Is there anything exaggerated in this sentiment of respect for the home of our ancestors on the female side? Surely, Ronald, you are not touched with the utilitarian spirit of the age?'

'But—where is the money to come from?'

'Money can always be found for what is needful.'

'But this is hardly a necessity, brother.'

'Not a necessity, exactly, but almost a duty. All the country is invaded by rich tradesmen, and engineers who have been knighted for building bridges, and manufacturers out of the North. Our old country gentry are becoming extinct. I do my best to keep our neighbourhood select. There is no knowing what mischief a new man might do coming into our proximity. He would flood the country with nineteenth-century ideas, and subvert our tenants.'

'Have you spoken to Worthivale about this?'

'Not yet. I saw no need. He would combat it, of course. He is a good man, but narrow; pettifogging in his ideas, no breadth of view, always after reduction of outlay; never disposed to deal liberally with the tenants.'

'You have taken no step in the matter, I trust.'

'I cannot say that I have taken *no* step, but I have not yet bought the property. I have opened negotiations.'

'Do nothing, I entreat you—do nothing till after the marriage.'

'It may then be too late. The property may have passed into most objectionable hands.'

'Consult Saltcombe. Consult Edward. For Heaven's sake move no further without consideration.'

'I have considered. You are very strange this morning, Ronald. I do not understand your manner or your mood.'

'I am out of sorts. I am bewildered. Spend ten thousand on Fowelscombe and buy Revelstoke. Lord bless me!' He recovered his composure. 'Excuse me, Duke, you take me by

surprise. Do nothing till I have had another talk with you about it.'

'My dear Ronald, what does it concern you whether I buy Revelstoke or not? I am buying to suit my own notions, and, though I value your opinions, I am not bound to submit to them. Now I really must attack my letters. I will detain you no longer. My conscience reproaches me for having taken up so much of your precious time; pray return to your turning of knobs.'

CHAPTER XXXV.

A CARD CASTLE.

Lord Ronald returned to his room and spent the rest of the day in turning. The days were short, and he made the most of the little light. His hand wanted its usual steadiness, or his mind wandered to other matters; for he spoiled several of the knobs he worked at that afternoon.

He was engaged on the twenty-sixth in the gathering dusk when he heard a step behind him, and looked round. 'Mercy on me!' he exclaimed, and cut into and spoiled the twenty-sixth knob. 'What is the meaning of this?'

He saw the Marquess before him, worn, white, hollow-eyed. 'Good Heavens, Saltcombe! How come you here? What has happened? What is the matter with you? Have you been ill?'

'Do not overwhelm me with questions, uncle,' answered Lord Saltcombe. 'I can answer but one at a time.'

'But this is amazing. Why have you not written? What do you mean by dropping on one from the sky without warning?'

'There, uncle, leave the lathe. I want a word with you. I have matters of importance to communicate. Come out of your workshop into the other room.'

'I am at your service. Merciful powers! what a pack of troubles and bewilderments come upon one all at once! First, Worthivale bursts in on me, then the Duke drops down on me, and now you spring on me like a ghost—my senses are stupefied or scared away. No bad news, I hope? Take that chair by the fire. How pale, how ill you look! Tell me the truth, Herbert, have you been sick?'

Lord Saltcombe shook his head.

'Your father is put out at your not writing. I thought that sickness might account for the neglect.'

'I have not been ill.'

'Then why have you not written? I found the Duke this morning in a tantrum about it. He will call you sharply to task. What have you been doing with yourself?'

'I am sorry if I have given my father pain. I would spare him every annoyance. What I have to communicate now is likely to disturb him. Miss Rigsby and I have not succeeded in liking each other more, the more we have seen of each other.'

'What? How? You don't mean to say——you!—you surely are not going to tell me——'

'That the engagement is at an end.'

Lord Ronald started. 'At an end! Herbert, you are out of your senses, or I am dreaming.'

'It is true. The engagement has been broken off. Mr. Rigsby must have picked up exaggerated reports of the state of our pecuniary affairs, and he began impertinently to catechise me about them. I could do no other than refuse to answer his questions.'

The General clasped his hands on his knees, wrung them, and groaned. 'Saltcombe! do you know that we have been building on your marriage? Do you know that without it we are hopelessly lost? Your marriage was the one cord to which we clung. That gone, we sink. There is no salvation anywhere.'

'I know it,' answered the Marquess, gloomily. 'I know more than that. We drag others who have trusted us into ruin along with us. But it cannot be helped. I have done my utmost. I am not to blame—not in this matter, at least. I did what was required of me. I constrained myself to be civil and play the lover to a girl I could not like, to one with whom I could not associate with any pleasure. I proposed to her. I never betrayed my feelings by a look, a gesture, or a word. I was prepared to make her my wife, and when she was my wife you may rely on me I would have failed in no duty towards her. But I could not endure to be treated with impertinence—not by such as Rigsby.'

'Rigsby treat you with impertinence! It is inconceivable, you have misunderstood him. I will go post-haste to Plymouth and explain matters, and effect a reconciliation. You must marry the girl, you must.'

'I cannot do so. Mr. Rigsby does not wish it. He has been frightened by gossip about our difficulties, and he thinks we will involve him and throw away his daughter's fortune.'

'But he ought to be proud, happy to contribute——'

'Perhaps he ought, but he is not. On the contrary, he declines the honour.'

'Heaven help us, we are lost! Do you know, Saltcombe, that some of the mortgages are called up, and unless we find the money we shall be compelled to sell? It is too dreadful!'

'I have done what I could. To bear to be taken to task by that Mr. Rigsby exceeded my endurance.'

'Did you break with him, or he with you?'

'He came to me, as I believe, with the express purpose of bringing about a rupture. He charged us with being ruined, and wanting to stave off ruin with his money.'

'That is true.'

'It may be true, but it is impertinence to say it.'

'So you flared up and upset the salt?'

'I declined to be cross-questioned.'

'What is to be done about conveying this news to the Duke? It must be done gently, lest it excite him and affect his heart.'

'If you think best, uncle, that I should take all the blame on myself, I will do so. Let my father suppose me capricious, he will be annoyed, but it will pass. He did not look cordially on this engagement. He did not care for the connection. If he thinks that the planter broke it off his pride will be hurt, he will feel it as an insult, and that will agitate him profoundly. No; best let me bear the blame.'

Lord Ronald put his hand to his head. He was too bewildered to think; he looked at the Marquess, then at the fire, almost stupidly. Both were silent for some time.

'I came in quietly, without being observed,' said Lord Saltcombe. 'I wished to have a word with you before I saw anyone else. I had rather not meet Grace to-night.'

'The Duke must be prepared for this. You have shaken me. I cannot collect my thoughts. We must telegraph for the Archdeacon. We shall want his advice. What a card castle we have been erecting, Saltcombe! and now with a puff it is down in ruins.'

'I will go and sleep at the lodge. Beavis will give me a shakedown. I do not wish to meet Grace till I am more composed, and I do not want the news of my return to be carried to my father till you have prepared him.'

'What am I to say? What can I say?'

'Tell him that you have heard unpleasant tidings from Plymouth, and that you expect me to be back to-morrow.'

'I will do so. Good Heavens, Saltcombe! will you believe it? the Duke, in sublime unconsciousness, is planning the outlay of ten thousand pounds on Fowelscombe and the purchase of Revelstoke. The only possible good I see in your return is that it will render the outlay on Fowelscombe unnecessary, and you must dissuade him from buying an acre at Revelstoke. There is no money—not one penny; and the mortgages on Court Royal and Kingsbridge are called up. What are we to do? Now go quietly and get Beavis to telegraph to the Archdeacon. My head is not clear enough in this whirl. He is a business man, and always knows what should be done.'

He paced the room. 'There is the first bell,' he said; 'I must dress for dinner. I will do what I can to prepare the Duke. Merciful powers! how much is demanded of me! I would rather command in an engagement with Afghans.'

When Lord Saltcombe had gone he dressed hastily, but was late when he came down. The second bell had rung. The Duke disliked unpunctuality. The General had never failed in this particular before.

'Why, Ronald,' he said, 'is the weather going to change? Are the heavens about to fall, that you come lagging after the time? Will you give your arm to Grace? I take in my little friend Lucy. What a small party we are! How is it the vicar and Mrs. Townley have not been invited, or Beavis, or the Sheepwashes, or some one? I dislike an empty table. Now Saltcombe is away the party is reduced so low that conversation flags. With the best intentions and the most brilliant wits we must suffer from exhaustion of topics. Grace, have you heard from that tiresome brother of yours who is too enamoured to write?'

The brilliantly lighted dining-room, the fire of oak on the hearth burning merrily, the glittering silver and glass on the table, the flowers that adorned it, yellow alamandas and maiden-hair fern laid on the white cloth; the buff and scarlet footmen—the general brightness, comfort, beauty, struck the General as it had never struck him before, conscious as he was of the desperate situation of affairs. He was out of spirits. He had not dressed with his usual care, his tie was twisted, one of his cuffs was *minus* a stud, and slipped over his hand. The Duke observed his troubled looks, but said nothing. He

thought he had been too short with his brother in the forenoon, and regretted it. This, no doubt, was distressing Lord Ronald. Lady Grace was always quiet; she could talk pleasantly, but lacked the power of originating and keeping up a conversation. Lucy threw herself into the gap; she was skilful to maintain a conversation, and give it a fillip when it flagged. An invaluable person at table when spirits were low.

'You good little maid,' said the Duke, 'you are to me an unfailing source of admiration. Always lively, with your dark eyes sparkling, and your fresh cheek blooming, and your tongue never lacking a happy speech.'

'It could not be otherwise, your Grace, when you are always flattering,' said Lucy.

When Lady Grace and Miss Worthivale retired the Duke passed the port to his brother. 'You never touch claret, I think?' Then, noticing that Lord Ronald's hand shook as he filled his glass, he asked, 'What ails you, Ronald, to-day? You look out of sorts.'

'I have received unpleasant news from Plymouth.'

'From Plymouth!' repeated the Duke. 'Not a letter from Saltcombe, surely?'

'No, Saltcombe has not written to me, but I have heard something affecting him which I do not like.'

'What do you mean? Is he ill?'

'No, not that.'

'What is it, then?'

'I don't fancy his love-making is proceeding smoothly.'

'The course of true love never did run smooth,' said the Duke. 'Lovers always fall out, and make up their quarrels next day. That is a commonplace in Cupid's maxims.'

'I don't mean that,' said the General. He was uneasy: strict in his ideas of right and wrong, he was unskilled to act a part and speak half the truth. He turned hot, then cold.

'What is it, then?'

'I believe Dulcina Rigsby dresses very badly.'

'I did not like her taste here, but that is a matter for ladies to consider, not men. For my part, I think the modern fashions detestable.'

'I hear she makes herself ridiculous by her outrageous style.'

The Duke frowned.

'Of course Saltcombe does not like his future wife to become the laughing-stock of Plymouth.'

The Duke pushed his glass from him. 'Ronald,' he said, 'this is intolerable. A future Marchioness of Saltcombe the—the laughing-stock—do you know what you are saying?'

The General crossed his legs, then uncrossed them, leaned back in his chair, filled his glass again, took some candied angelica, and said, looking uncomfortable and nervous, 'Saltcombe is sensitive. He cannot stand that sort of thing. I hear he will be home to-morrow.'

'Saltcombe—here! Do you mean to hint that the engagement is off?'

'I know nothing definitely. I can't say absolutely off, past all patching up. You can understand that if Miss Dulcina Rigsby gives herself airs unbecoming a lady, Saltcombe will feel it. The old father, too, the coffee-planter, is a rough stick, and perhaps does not know how far liberties are allowed on the footing on which he stands.'

The Duke looked grave. He picked some grapes and ate them. Then he said, 'Saltcombe knows what befits his position. She who is to be Duchess of Kingsbridge when I am gone must not be an object of ridicule. If she were a princess of blood royal, and failed in tact, she would be unworthy to wear our strawberries. Not for the world would I do what is wrong, not for ten thousand worlds would I excite a jeer.' He paused. 'You think Herbert will return. Very well. He will do what is right. I shall be glad to see him. You think the match is broken off. I am content. The house of Kingsbridge does not want Rigsbys to prop it up. Let us rejoin the ladies.'

In the meantime Lady Grace and Lucy were sitting side by side on the sofa in the drawing-room. Grace had her arm round Lucy's waist, and Lucy held a screen to cut off the red firelight from her friend's face.

'How lively you are to-day, Lucy!' said Lady Grace. 'I do not know what it was at dinner that put my father and uncle out of spirits, and observing them I lost the desire to talk; but you flew to the rescue, and rattled on, and forced us all to laugh; and now I feel your heart; you are quivering with animation. What is it, Lucy? I have not found you in such buoyant humour for many a day.'

'Shall I tell you a secret?'

'If pleasant.'

'It is excellent. I am sure it will rejoice you.'

'Then do tell me.'

'What will you pay me for it?'

'I will give you a kiss.'

'I will pour out my whole heart's contents for that.'

'Then do not tantalise me. What is it?'

'What do you wish best of all?'

Lady Grace slightly coloured.

'You do not like Miss Rigsby, do you?' asked Lucy.

'Oh, Lucy! don't ask such a question.'

'I do not. I detest her, a nasty, spoiled, conceited piece of goods, without fresh feeling, without good taste, without healthy brains.'

'You must not say that,' said Lady Grace.

'I must and I will. I could not do so before. I can now.' Her eyes danced, the dimples came in her pretty rosy cheeks, and her lips quivered. 'Only think! Lord Saltcombe is home. It is all off.'

'Herbert home!' exclaimed Lady Grace. 'What is off?'

'The engagement. Broken off, and a good thing too. I am heartily glad, and could dance for joy. So could you. You never liked her. You never thought her worthy of Lord Saltcombe.'

'Oh, Lucy!' Lady Grace stood up. She was nervous with excitement. 'Oh, dear Lucy, is this so? How do you know it?'

'It is quite true. Are you not glad?'

Lady Grace hesitated and looked into the fire. 'I do not know what to say. I hope he has not behaved badly. I cannot think that he has. Yet the breaking off of the engagement can hardly come from her. She seemed very fond of him.'

'You may be quite sure Lord Saltcombe would not do what is wrong. I know nothing about how it came about, I only know that it is so. You never liked her, did you?'

'No. I did my utmost to become attached to her, but I could not. How did you hear of this?'

'Through my father.'

'Did Lord Saltcombe write to him? Herbert has not deigned to send me a line since he left.'

'Lord Saltcombe is at our house.'

'Oh, Lucy!'

'He did not like to appear here till Lord Ronald had prepared the Duke's mind.'

'Oh, Lucy! I wonder how he bears it. Do you think he was fond of her?'

'I cannot believe it.'

'Lucy! Nor do I. What is the meaning of this? I am like a deaf person at a play, or as one who comes in at the second act and sees much movement, but is unable to lay hold of the threads of the plot. Uncle Edward, Aunt Elizabeth, Uncle Ronald, all seemed to me bent on this marriage. Beavis advised it. What made it so desirable? I asked Beavis at the ball, but he would tell me nothing. I am afraid this rupture will disappoint them. Uncle Ronald's face and cuff at dinner showed me he was disturbed. Why is he disturbed? What is there so attractive in Dulcina Rigsby?'

Instead of answering these questions Lucy said, 'My father says that Lord Saltcombe is looking wretchedly ill, so white, and hollow under the eyes.'

'Lucy! I must see him. Amuse the Duke whilst I run to the lodge. I cannot bear that my brother should be there unhappy and unwell, and I not see him and know the reason of his distress and sickness. I shall not be gone long. Make some excuse for my absence.'

In a very few minutes Lady Grace was in the park. She was in pale blue silk evening dress; she had thrown a cloak over her shoulders, and a light knitted woollen shawl over her head. The deer started as she passed, but when they heard her voice they came after her, thrusting their noses against her hand. She walked quickly, and when she reached the steward's lodge a little colour was in her delicate cheeks.

'Emily,' she said to the maid who opened the door, 'is Lord Saltcombe here?'

'Yes, my lady. He is in the study with Mr. Beavis.'

'They will excuse my interrupting them,' she said, passed down the passage, lightly tapped at the door, and in another moment was in her brother's arms. Beavis withdrew, but not before Lady Grace, who never forgot what was due to every one, had put her hand into his and thanked him with her eyes. Her heart was too full to speak. The fine lips were quivering, and tears were trembling in her eyes like dew in the calyx of a flower.

She made her brother stand away from her at arm's length and looked at him.

'Oh, Herbert!' she said, in a low plaintive voice, 'you have suffered. Oh, my dear, dear brother, I must know all. You cannot conceive the pain it is to me to be shut out from all the mysteries that surround you. You have no one but

me, I none but you, who can perfectly understand and feel for each other. Tell me everything. You have not been ill in body. You have been ill in mind. Lucy will not be candid with me, and she knows more than I. Beavis only bids me trust him. My uncle Roland is unapproachable. I must come to you. I cannot bear it. I cannot. Dear Herbert! as you love me, tell me everything.'

'Sit down, Grace.'

'No, I cannot; I must not stay. I can rest neither here nor anywhere, not on my bed, till the key is put in my hands. I lie awake thinking and puzzling till I fear I shall go mad. Anything is better than this uncertainty. Why are you unhappy? Why have you all made such a point of this marriage? Why is Uncle Roland so upset because it is broken off? What did Beavis see in her to urge you to make her your wife?'

'I cannot tell you, Grace.'

'You must, Herbert. I will no longer be left in doubt.'

'Even the Duke does not know.'

'So I perceive. He alone has been indifferent.'

'You must be spared what would give you pain.'

'I do not ask to be spared. If you have a cross laid on your shoulder which is weighing you down, shift one arm to my shoulder and give me your hand, we will carry it together. I am brave, Herbert. I can bear anything. Only one thing at a time, Herbert: first tell me—did you love Dulcina?'

'I was determined to do so; I did my best, but I could not. Love will not be forced.'

'I am glad to hear you say that. Your conduct is made doubly inexplicable now. Why did you propose to her?'

Lord Saltcombe hesitated. After a while, during which she waited with patience, he said, looking down, 'Very well, Grace, know all. We are ruined. The marriage was arranged in the hopes of saving us from going to pieces. The Rigsbys are very rich.'

'Is that all?' asked Lady Grace, with a sigh of relief.

'All!' echoed Lord Saltcombe. 'Ruin—our ruin proclaimed by every newspaper throughout England, the loss of our property, the sale of Court Royal.'

'It will kill papa.'

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE COUNCIL OF COURT ROYAL.

THE first council of which we have given the acts was of a private nature. It had no pretentions to œcumenicity. It was a synod, not a council. It had been convoked in the interests of the Kingsbridge House, but had been attended by the Worthivale family only.

The aspect of affairs was now so desperate that a council was summoned to meet as soon as Lord Edward arrived from Sleepy Hollow.

The steward had called his son to his aid, and Beavis had gone carefully through the accounts—not an easy task, for his father was unsystematic.

'What we want,' said Mr. Worthivale, 'is to gain time. Give us a little space in which to look about, and we will find another wealthy heiress for Lord Saltcombe. There are as good fish in the sea as they that come out of it.' He clung to this forlorn hope.

Beavis spent several days over the accounts. He examined all the mortgages, the notes of hand ; he investigated the expenditure in its several branches, and brought all into form. His time in a lawyer's office stood him in good stead. He had acquired system, and a power of analysis lacking in his father.

Lord Edward arrived. To her great regret, Lady Elizabeth was unable to accompany him. Lent was approaching, and she had to arrange the services and appoint the preachers. Moreover, it was thought unadvisable for her to be away just then. A faint and hectic tinge of opinion had manifested itself in the pellucid brain of the excellent curate.

Whilst Beavis was at work his father continually interrupted him with explanations that were unnecessary, apologies for his own conduct that were uncalled for, and proposals that were inadmissible.

'Lord Ronald spoke rather sharply to me the other day,' he said. 'He almost laid the blame on me for having got the family into such a condition.'

'You have no occasion for self-reproach,' said Beavis. 'If it had been possible to effect anything, you would have done it.

You have, indeed, done for them more than you should. Lucy's money——'

'Now, no more on that point,' interrupted his father. 'We shall have it again, certainly.'

'The only thing that could have saved the family was a plain and bald statement of its difficulties and desperate condition, and that they would have refused to listen to. They buoy themselves up on hopes that are fallacious, and trust to a Providence to save them that expects every man to take the first steps towards saving himself.'

'Heaven knows I have preached retrenchment, but my words have been unheeded. Now take the books under your arm and come with me. They will be assembled by this time.'

Father and son walked through the park to Court Royal. Neither spoke; their thoughts depressed them. They entered the General's private sitting-room, and saw there Lord Edward, Lord Ronald, and the Marquess. At the door was Lady Grace. She put up her hand to stay Beavis. 'Please let me in also. Saltcombe has told me a little, I want now to know all.'

He hesitated, but without waiting for a refusal she passed in.

'Grace!' exclaimed Lord Ronald, 'this may not be. It is rude to show a lady the door, but I cannot help myself when business is in consideration.'

'I know what the business is,' she answered, 'and I am interested in it as well as you.' She ran to the Archdeacon, and nestled on a stool at his side, took his right arm and put it over her shoulder. 'Uncle Edward, speak a word for me.'

'Let her stay,' said the Archdeacon. 'A woman's wit is sometimes worth more than a man's wisdom.'

'Thank you, uncle!' She pressed his hand.

The General occupied a hard chair with a straight back. He had crossed his legs and folded his arms. His face was grave and set. The Archdeacon sat in a lounging chair and kept his arm round his niece, sometimes raising his wrinkled hand to stroke her smooth hair. Lord Saltcombe stood in the window looking out. The steward opened proceedings by describing the condition of the finances. Two mortgages had been already called up, and another he feared every day would be so. Those already noted were on Court Royal and Kingsbridge. Rumour had no doubt been busy with their name, for bills had poured in from all quarters, tradesmen's bills

pressing for immediate payment. Probably the bad times, the fall in the value of land, and threatened legislation menacing land, had alarmed the mortgagees. As he went on he became confused, repeated himself, appealed to figures and read them wrong, and involved the case to such an extent that when he sat down none who had heard him were wiser than when he stood up.

Beavis had his chair near his father. He was distressed at the old man's inability to put clearly what he had to say, due to his inability to think clearly. He listened with patience, and when he had done he said, 'I have gone most carefully through all the accounts, have drawn up a table of debts, and a list of the mortgages and bills. I know exactly what the expenditure has been in every department during the last three years, also what the assets have been. Everything is here, *en précis*, on the table, in so simple a form that a child can understand it. The situation is one from which extrication is only possible by having recourse to heroic methods. If the family difficulties had been considered in time, salvation might not have been so difficult as it is now.'

'Come, come!' said the Archdeacon, sharply, 'don't exaggerate.'

'I am not exaggerating, my lord. May I pass these papers to you? You can convince yourself that I am speaking within the mark.'

'What is the amount absolutely necessary?' asked Lady Grace in a calm, low tone.

'Oh, Lady Grace,' said Beavis, hastily, 'you ought not to be here. You unnerve me.'

'Let my presence rather brace you to declare the whole truth. Deal plainly with us. The surgeon's hand must not tremble when he touches the wound.'

'I need not enumerate all the mortgages,' continued Beavis. 'The heaviest is that of four hundred thousand on the Loddiswell property, the annual interest on which is sixteen thousand. That is just six thousand above what we are now drawing from the estates thus charged. This is in the hands of an Insurance Company, and is not called in. Seventy thousand was raised for the building of Court Royal. We have a little mortgage on Charlecombe. Neither of these is notified.'

'Of course not,' interrupted the steward.

'There is a smaller, much smaller mortgage on the manor of Kingsbridge of four thousand five hundred. As you may

know, though his Grace is Lord of the Manor of Kingsbridge, he has very little property in the place itself. A higher mortgage could not be got on that. This is at four and three quarters. So is that for forty-six thousand pounds on Court Royal itself. These two are in the hands of a Mr. Emmanuel, and he has given notice that they must be paid within three months. There is another, on Alvington, which we fear will also have to be met. It is not in the same hands, but in those of another Jew.'

'Well,' said Lord Ronald, 'fifty-five thousand pounds is not so prodigious a sum. I suppose these two mortgages can be transferred.'

'I do not think it. Remember that Court Royal is nearly all park—park and pleasure-ground bring in no rents.'

'Then some other mortgages must be imposed. If Court Royal and Kingsbridge be relieved, what matter?'

'We cannot afford to do that; besides, investments of this sort are looked shyly at now.'

'What is the total of the annual charges on the property?' asked the Archdeacon.

'Twenty-four to twenty-five thousand.'

'And the income?'

'At present under thirty-five thousand.'

'Then—living on ten thousand.'

'No—dying on it, my lord.'

A dead silence ensued. Lady Grace's eyes were fixed on Beavis. Lord Saltcombe looked through the glass into the park, where the rooks were wheeling and dancing round their nests, which they were repairing with twigs, and stopping with tufts of pine shoots.

'I have not deducted the annual cost of the property, the rates, taxes—nor the Duke's thousand.'

'It is the deuce of a mischief that the marriage has fallen through,' said the General. 'That would have set us on our feet again.'

Lord Saltcombe still said nothing.

'If no one has a suggestion to make,' said Beavis, 'I will venture to make one. No one can doubt that I am heart and soul devoted to the cause of your illustrious house. I beg you to listen to me with patience if I am forced to say what is unpleasant. I know the pride, the legitimate pride, of the family. It is this pride which has allowed it to slip into such straits. With a little more readiness to look at facts, and

accommodate itself to circumstances, the financial position of the family would have been convalescent, and we should not now be wondering whether life or death is heavier in the scale of fate. Love of splendour, reckless improvidence, have made the deficit grow in geometrical proportions. Firmness—excuse my saying it—courage to grapple with the evil, have been wanting, and the evil has grown to such a head that it is almost past grappling with.'

'Really, Mr. Beavis Worthivale,' said the General, testily, 'you forget our grey hairs. You are a young man, and you are lecturing men old enough to be your grandfathers.'

'I think, Mr. Beavis, you are too strong in your expressions,' said the Archdeacon.

His father, shocked beyond power of speech, seized him by the arms, and held up his hand in warning to be cautious.

'He is right,' said Lady Grace. 'Uncle Ronald, do not be angry. He speaks the truth because he is too true a friend to withhold it from us.'

Beavis slightly bowed to her, and went on, 'Safety may yet be had, but at a price. The only possible way out of the labyrinth of debt is for the Duke and the Marquess to resolve on the sale of some of the estates. Unfortunately, a worse time for the sale of land could not have befallen us. I believe that good properties do not now fetch five-and-twenty years' purchase, and some are put up to auction and find no buyers. Still, let us hope for the best. Fowelscombe is worth two thousand a year; at thirty years' purchase that would be sixty thousand; add another ten thousand for the house and timber and exceptionally beautiful situation, that makes seventy thousand. With that you can pay off Mr. Emmanuel and one of the other smaller mortgages. I should advise, sell also the manorial rights in Kingsbridge. The town will buy those, and give a good price for them.'

'Really! really!' exclaimed the General, 'I cannot endure this. Sell the manor from which the Duke takes his title! What next?'

'Expenses will have to be cut down at least a half, the number of servants reduced, and the Marquess must make up his mind to continue living in the country, and keeping Kingsbridge House, Piccadilly, closed.'

'Put a bill in the window, "To be let furnished," and so make a few guineas,' gasped the General.

Lady Grace got up from her stool and put her arm through

that of Lord Ronald, and remained at his side, holding his hand. Her touch soothed him and allayed his irritation.

'The Duke will never consent to this,' said Lord Edward.

'It will not do even to suggest it to him. So much of the family property has been thrown away by our ancestors, that he is particularly tenacious on this point. Nothing will induce him to part with an acre.'

'He is talking of buying Revelstoke, not of selling,' said Lord Ronald.

'Remember,' said Beavis, 'if he will not voluntarily part with Fowelscombe, he will have Court Royal taken from under his feet and over his head. There is a power of sale in all mortgages.'

'They will not dare to do it,' exclaimed the General: 'the whole country would rise up and cry shame.'

'What do a parcel of Jew money-lenders care about the feelings of the country?' said Beavis. 'Besides, you mistake. The country would approve. It would cry shame on the house of Eveleigh for not making a voluntary effort to pay its debts.'

Lord Ronald's fingers nipped the hand of Lady Grace convulsively, and so sharply as to cause her pain. His face quivered, and he prepared to say an angry word, when she laid her other hand on his lips.

'Mr. Beavis is quite right,' she said; 'I feel that he is. We should do everything in our power to pay our debts, and not lie, curled up in our pride like hedgehogs, for the dogs to worry.'

The General turned to his brother. 'Edward,' he said, 'we look to you for advice. These hot-headed, rash young folk would fire the stack to expel the mice. You are a man of experience, with a business head. What do you propose?'

'There is nothing like moderation,' said the Archdeacon. 'I object to all extremes, doctrinal or practical. Let us be *via media* in all we do and propose. I agree with you, Mr. Beavis, that something must be done. I think with you, Ronald, that his proposal is too drastic. My suggestion is quite other. Let Mr. Worthivale write to the mortgagees or their agents—I mean those who are pressing, and those likely to be troublesome—and ask for delay. It would not be wise to sell land just now. Mr. Beavis said as much. The present depression cannot last. The wheat-producing area in America is rapidly being taken up, and the soil is becoming exhausted, at the same time that the population of America is increasing, and there-

fore the home consumption is greater. We want nothing but delay. Invite the two or three disagreeable mortgagees to a meeting at the lodge, and we shall see what will be the result. I shall make a point of being there.'

Beavis gathered the papers together. His cheeks were flushed.

'Saltcombe has not spoken,' exclaimed Lord Roland, 'yet he is the one most concerned.'

'I bow to the superior wisdom of my uncles,' answered the Marquess, 'though I agree with Beavis. I do not, however, see any chance of persuading the Duke to a sale.'

'I think with you, Herbert, in this as in all things,' said Lady Grace. 'Let us have amputation before mortification sets in.'

At that moment a tap at the door, and the Duke's valet entered hastily, looking frightened.

'My lords,' he said, 'his Grace is not well! Something has happened!'

CHAPTER XXXVII.

A SISTER OF MERCY.

The brothers of the Duke, his son and daughter, hurried to his apartment in alarm. The Worthivales, father and son, remained where they were, anxious to know the cause of alarm, but unwilling to intrude.

The Archdeacon turned faint; he also suffered from the heart, and the Marquess was obliged to lend him an arm. The General and Lady Grace were the first to enter the Duke's morning sitting-room.

We must explain the cause of the Duke's excitement.

He had been taking his breakfast when the valet informed him that a lady—a Sister of Mercy—had called and desired very particularly to see his Grace, if he would generously allow her an interview of five minutes.

'A Sister of Mercy!' exclaimed the Duke. 'What—Thompson, in the hall. Kept her waiting?—Excellent people—most certainly I will see her. Some subscription wanted to an orphanage, or a refuge, or a laundry. Show her up at once—of course, of course.'

A lady entered in black, closely veiled.

'Take a chair, my dear madam,' said the Duke, rising. 'Thompson, put a chair. That will do. Pray be seated, madam.'

'Thank your Grace,' said the Sister, waiting till the valet had left the room; 'I had rather stand. I will not detain you five minutes.'

'No detention at all, except as a pleased captive,' said the Duke. 'It does an old worthless fellow like me, shelved from all useful work, good to see one whose life is devoted to doing deeds of charity, to care and toil for others. The Sister of Mercy sums up in her little self the whole duty of man, as a proverb condenses the experience of ages.'

'Your Grace must excuse me. I do no deeds of charity. I owe no duties to my fellows. I am not a Sister. I am a nobody. I am only Joanna.' She threw back her veil. The Duke looked at her with mingled surprise and admiration; surprise, because he did not understand her words, admiration at her beauty.

'You have not heard of me,' said Joanna. 'I do not suppose you have; but I know about you, and I know more concerning your affairs than do you yourself. I dressed in this disguise to come here, because I did not wish the servants to recognise and stop me. I determined to see your Grace. I am only a small mouse, and you a great lion, but you are fallen into a net, and I can bite the threads and free you.'

'You must excuse me, Miss Joanna—but I really do not see your drift, and understand to what I owe the honour of this visit.' The Duke put his hand to his head.

'Your Grace is in the hands of Jews.' Joanna opened a little handbag, and threw some deeds on the table. 'Look there—the mortgages my master holds. I have taken them. I bring them to you. Tear them up and burn them, and Lazarus cannot touch you. I am with Lazarus. I would have allowed myself to be hacked to pieces rather than hurt him, but he dealt falsely by me. He sent me here to pry into and discover for him your affairs. Lord Saltcombe and Lady Grace have been kind to me. I will not help to bring them down. I will show them that I am grateful. I love—I dearly love Lady Grace.'

'My good Miss Joanna,' said the Duke, 'I am perplexed beyond measure. I cannot understand——'

'Those deeds will explain all,' said Joanna, interrupting

him. 'I have not many minutes to spare. I have come here from Plymouth, and must return whilst my master is absent. All lies in a nutshell. There are your mortgages. Destroy them.'

'I cannot touch them,' said the Duke. 'Do you mean to tell me that you have abstracted them from the holder?'

'Yes, I took them from his strong box.'

'You have acted very wrongly. You have committed a crime. You are liable to be tried for this and imprisoned. This is robbery.'

'I do not care. I want to do something for Lady Grace. I am the Jew's heir, and if I steal the money I rob myself. There is no harm in that. Besides, he used me unfairly in sending me here, and I will pay him out for it.'

'You must go back at once and replace these documents where you found them.'

'You will not destroy them?'

'Most certainly not.'

'But I will tear them to shreds.'

'That will not relieve me. I am morally bound by them. I should meet my liabilities just the same whether the deeds existed or were destroyed. I hold their counterparts, and will act on them. There—child—take them back, and never, never again act in so rash a manner. Your motives may be good, but your conduct has been most reprehensible.'

'Your Grace does not know all. The truth is kept from you. Ask Lord Saltcombe, ask Lord Ronald, to tell you the truth. Or there—look at this Society paper. There is a paragraph in it about you. My master put it in, and was paid for the information. No—do not look at it till I am gone. I tell you that you are ruined, and the world knows it now. Your last hope was in the marriage of Lord Saltcombe, and that is taken from you. Will you have the mortgages?'

'Certainly, certainly not,' said the Duke, uneasy, offended, bewildered. He could not understand who Joanna was, why she addressed him, what her interest in him was, and his pride was hurt at her offer, at her daring to talk of his embarrassments to his face.

'And really,' he continued, after a pause, 'I am at a loss to explain this visit; though I feel flattered that my family, or any members in it, should have inspired——'

Joanna again interrupted him. 'Your Grace, my time is

precious. I must be off. I have made you the offer, and you have refused it. I can do no more. There is the paper. I have marked the paragraph with blue pencil.'

She thrust the deeds back in her bag, and, before the Duke had put his hand to the bell, left the room.

The Duke sat for some moments, rubbing his brow, trying to gather his thoughts. The visit was so short, Joanna's manner so extraordinary, her offer so outrageous, that the old man was completely thrown out of his usual train by it. He shook his head and took up the Society paper. His eye was caught at once by the paragraph Joanna had pencilled. It was to the effect that the projected marriage between the Marquess of S——, heir to the most embarrassed Duke in the three kingdoms, and the daughter of a wealthy planter from the East Indies, was broken off owing to the ruinous condition of the Duke's affairs, and to the fact that the father of the lady declined to allow his hard-won savings to be thrown away in washing the Duke's hands. The editor added that it was satisfactory to know that some birds were sufficiently old not to be caught with *Salt*!

The state of excitement into which reading this threw the Duke alarmed Thompson, and he ran to summon aid. Mrs. Probus, on hearing that the Duke was ill, ordered one of the grooms to ride for the doctor, a hot bath to be got ready, a couple of bricks to be put into the kitchen fire for application to his Grace's soles, and to direct that spirits and cordials should be taken at once to the Duke's apartment.

When the General entered, followed by Lady Grace, he found Lucy already by the chair of the old man, vainly endeavouring to pacify him. The Duke tried to speak, but words failed him. He held the newspaper and waved it impatiently, and pointed to it with the other hand. Lucy had a glass of water, and entreated him to drink it, but he shook his head angrily.

Then the Archdeacon came in, leaning on Lord Saltcombe's arm.

'What is it? What is the matter? Is it a fit?' he asked. 'Bathe his temples with vinegar, give him sal volatile. The action of the heart must be stimulated.'

The Duke was irritated at the attempts to doctor him with cold water and compresses, with vinegar and cordials. After a moment of struggle he gasped forth, 'Take this trash away. I am not ill. I am insulted. Get along with you,

Thompson. Turn the servants out. I don't want all the world here.—Please leave my chair, Lucy.—Grace, I had rather you were not in the room. What have you all come tumbling in on me for in this fashion? I am not dying. The room is not in flames. I pray you—leave me alone with my brothers.'

'Please let me stay by you, papa,' said Lady Grace.

He made an impatient gesture with his head, but she would take no denial. She stepped back behind his chair, and Lucy left the room.

When the Duke saw that he had only his son and brothers before him, he recovered himself, and, holding out the paper, exclaimed, 'I have been insulted—grossly insulted. Look at this!'

The Archdeacon took the paper from his hand, and read it.

'What is it, Edward?' asked the General.

'Hand him the paper, Edward, when you have done reading the precious production. What do you think it dares—actually dares to say? Upon my word, the temerity of the press is inconceivable. It has the audacity to declare that we are ruined; that I—I, the Duke of Kingsbridge, am living on the forbearance of my creditors. Bless my soul! where are the lightnings of heaven, that they do not flash on heads that dare think, and tongues and hands that dare speak and write, such outrages?'

The General turned white and looked down. The Archdeacon folded the paper with trembling hands, and laid it on the table.

'I wish,' said Lord Ronald, 'that the old times were back, when I might call the editor out and put a pistol-shot through his head.'

'That cannot be. It is impossible now. A gentleman cannot redress a wrong,' said the Duke. 'If he takes a horsewhip and touches a dog that has snarled at him, he has to endure the indignity of being summoned for assault. You have not read the paragraph, Ronald. You had better not. It will fire your blood, and you will be committing some indiscretion. It dares to insinuate that we sent the Marquess hunting that girl for her money wherewith to buy off our creditors and secure prolongation of days to ourselves.'

Lord Ronald was too confused to speak, his temples became spotted red. He took the paper and read it.

'What has occasioned this?' asked his Grace. 'Is it possible that gossip is at work upon us—groundless gossip? Who has started it? How far has it gone? I know well enough that our fortunes are not as magnificent as they were in the reigns of the first Georges, and that the property is encumbered, but that is all. What is the meaning of this calumny starting to life?'

The Archdeacon looked at the Marquess, but as the General and Lord Saltcombe looked at him—the mainstay of the family—he answered, 'Do not put yourself out, Duke. There is no accounting for the origin and progress of tittle-tattle. It springs out of nothing, and swells to portentous size on nothing.'

'But, Edward, it kills like the fluke in the sheep. That also springs from an imperceptible nothing, but its effects are felt, not by the sheep only, but by the farmer, the landowner, and the parson. A germ of microscopic smallness disturbs the social system; no rents, no tithe, no trade.'

'Of course there are mortgages and debts,' said the Archdeacon.

'Of course there are,' exclaimed the Duke. 'There always have been. What landed estate is unencumbered? But what of that? Every oak bears oak-apples as well as acorns.'

'Put the paper in the fire,' said Lord Ronald, 'and its contents out of your mind.'

'The one is done more easily than the other,' answered the Duke. 'Indeed, the one is possible, the other is not; a bullet may be extracted, but the wound remains to ache and fester. But are things in a bad state here—so bad, I mean?' He turned to the Marquess. 'Saltcombe,' he said, 'since I have been ill you have had the charge of everything. I hope you have done your duty, and can answer to the point when I ask, is there occasion for this impertinence?' The Marquess hesitated. He was afraid of alarming his father; he could not dissemble. Whilst he hesitated Lady Grace stepped forward, knelt down at her father's feet, and leaning her hands on his knees, whilst she looked up fearlessly into his eyes, said, 'Papa, we are quite wrong in regarding you as too weak to bear bad news. You are a rock, and can stand the storm as well as the sunshine, is it not so? Well, dearest papa, it is quite true we are ruined. We do not know where to turn for money. The mortgagees are calling in their mortgages. There is nothing for it but to sell some of the property.' She paused, then turned with a smile to her uncles. 'There,' she

said, 'see how brave the dear old man is! how erect the silver head is held! He is no coward; he is not afraid to hear the truth, however dreadful the truth may be.'

The Duke was flattered. He bent forward and kissed his daughter on her brow. Then he leaned back in his chair, and looked from one to another. 'She exaggerates, no doubt.'

'It is too true, father,' said the Marquess, 'we have got into almost inextricable confusion. Still—there is hope. Worthivale is going to write to the troublesome mortgagees, and arrange for a delay.'

'Worthivale should never have allowed things to come to this pass. But I see exactly how it is. Worthivale is an alarmist, excellent fellow though he be. He is always crying out that there is no money for anything, and it has become a habit with him to hold up his hands and eyes in despair. He has persuaded himself that we are ruined, and you have been weak enough to listen to him and believe all he says. I know why he is crying out now. He is scared at the idea of my buying Revelstoke. You may tell him that I give it up; thereupon his sky will be set with a triple rainbow.'

'I agree with you,' said Lord Edward. 'Mr. Worthivale has taken his son Beavis into confidence, and the new broom sweeps up a dust. In a little while the dust will settle, and all go on as before.'

'Oh, Beavis!' exclaimed the Duke, 'this is Beavis's cry of wolf, is it?'

'Papa,' said Lady Grace in urgent tones, 'when the wolf did come the cry was disregarded.'

'Do not you meddle in these matters, my pretty,' said the Duke. 'It was cruel of them to disturb your mind with these false alarms. You should live above all sordid money cares. Go back to your flowers.' Then turning to the others: 'Worthivale is a good man of business, he will manage all.'

'But, papa,' said Lady Grace, 'how came you to get this wicked paper? Was it sent you by post?'

'No, dear. I received a call this morning from a lady, a Sister of Mercy, and she left it.'

'What! a Sister of Mercy read a Society paper!'

'Yes—I suppose so—even a Sister of Mercy—that is—but, upon my word, I am so bewildered; I hardly know who she really was. I rather incline to think she was a maniac.'

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

REFORMATION.

Since Joanna's return from Court Royal Lodge a change for the better had been effected in the house of the Golden Balls. She had been firm with Lazarus, and he had yielded. She kept everything in good order ; she refused peremptorily to have the kitchen and what belonged to the housekeeping department untidy and broken. She got white lime, mixed it herself, and with a pawned mason's brush whitewashed the kitchen, the back kitchen, and her own attic bedroom. She mixed yellow ochre with the wash and coloured the walls. Where the slates in the floor were broken, she relaid them herself in cement of her own mixing. She stitched some muslin and made a blind for her window. She scrubbed the shelves and table in the kitchen with pumice-stone and soda, till the white deal shone like new. When work for the day was over, she laid a rug before the kitchen fire, brought the tea-table before it, threw over it a cloth, and put on it her lamp. She seated herself beside the stove, with the door open, so that the red light flickered over her knees and skirt, and white stockings and neat shoes, whilst the lamp irradiated her face and hands, intent and engaged on needlework.

Joanna had always been an energetic worker, never idle, but her work hitherto had been unsystematic, undirected, desultory ; it was like her conscience, unsystematic, undirected, spasmodic in action. She had done what came to hand, and done it as the light of nature taught her. At Court Royal Lodge she had seen order, cleanliness, reduced to clockwork. She had learned that comfort was inseparable from both. Her feminine instinct for what is seemly and right was satisfied, and she was resolved, with the whole strength of her strong will, to reform the domestic arrangements at the Golden Balls.

She had several battles with Lazarus, but she was victorious along the line. The meals were better. He had made himself ill by the nastiness of the food he had eaten whilst she was away, and he was ready to yield a point in this particular, on her return, for his own health's sake. She did not openly oppose him when she found she could carry her purpose by quiet persistence.

When in Plymouth—at his private money-lending office, at which he was present for some hours in the day, an office without name on the door or window, quite a private lodging, to all appearance—he was well dressed, that is in respectable clothes, without patches, without splits, not discoloured. On his return he dived at once into his bedroom, and re-emerged, the wretchedest of old ragmen. 'It is in eating, Joanna, that clothes get spoiled. If we were angels, neither eating nor drinking, our clothes would never wear out. With the utmost care we cannot avoid speckling and splashing the cloth.'

'Where are my house clothes?' he asked one day, putting his head—only his head—out at the door. 'I can't find them anywhere, and I've been hunting for them high and low. I'll catch my death of cold. Have you taken them to darn? Tell me. I am all of a shiver.'

'I did take them,' said Joanna; 'but they are not fit for you to put on.'

'Oh, for the matter of that, this is home, sweet home, and anything will do there. Joanna, be a dearie, and walk backwards with them, and pass them in at the door whilst I hold it ajar.'

'I can't—I've sold them.'

'Sold them!' cried the Jew. 'Sold the very skin off my back! Oh, Joanna, I hope you had a good offer for them.'

'I sold them as old rags, three pounds for a penny. There were not many pounds in them; you had worn them threadbare.'

'Oh, Joanna! what am I to do? Where is the money?'

She came towards the door.

'I have it in my hand.'

He uttered a little scream, and drew in his head and shut the door. 'Pass it under. Brrr! it is dreadfully raw! What am I to do for clothes?'

She stood outside, and heard him counting the coppers.

'Very little, wretchedly little,' he muttered. 'You might almost as well have thrown the things away.'

'That would have been against the principles on which I have been reared—never do anything for nothing.'

'True doctrine,' said the Jew, 'I was speaking poetically. I strew flowers sometimes. It is my mind—ornate.'

Presently he called very loud, 'Joanna! I say, Joanna!'

'Well,' she answered, 'what do you want?'

'I'm quivering like gold-leaf,' he said plaintively through the door; 'I can't come out as I am.'

'Put on again the suit you went out in.'

'But I want my tea.'

'What of that?'

'It may drip. And bread and butter.'

'Well?'

'The little bits with butter on them may fall on my knees butter downwards, and stain me.'

'I've made you a sort of blouse,' said Joanna through the keyhole, 'in which you can be respectable. You can slip it over your suit when you come in.'

'But the seat, Joanna; the wear and tear there is sickening.'

'I've cushioned your chair,' she replied through the keyhole.

After a while Lazarus appeared, respectably dressed. Then the girl produced a smock she had made, and he drew it over his head.

'I look rustic in it,' he said; 'but I see the idea—it will save clothes. I approve.'

The kitchen looked cosy with the lamp and fire, the hearth-rug, the tablecloth, and the tea-things, and with the curtain drawn.

'It is beautiful, but expensive,' said Lazarus. 'Dear heart alive! you are burning the coals very fast.'

'I've reckoned up, and find it cheapest to have a good fire,' answered Joanna, 'cheaper by sevenpence three farthings per night.'

'How do you make that out?' asked the Jew. 'I'd be proud to know how spending can be converted into saving.'

'I worked one night without fire,' said Joanna in reply. 'I worked at the coat-turning, and my fingers were so cold I could hardly hold the needle, and had to put them in my mouth to bring the feeling into them. The next evening I worked with fire, the same number of hours, at the same sort of work, and did half as much again with warm fingers. Then I ciphered it all up—so much done at so many hours, and coals, by measure, at fourteen shillings per ton, and I reckon I cleared sevenpence three farthings.'

'Seven times eight makes fifty-six. Twelves in fifty-six, four and eight over. Seven farthings, one and three over. Penny three farthings from four-and-eight makes a total of

four-and-sixpence farthing. Say twelve weeks of firing, that makes—twelve times four, forty-eight; twelve times six, six shillings; forty-eight and six make fifty-two. Why, Joanna, that is the clearing of two pounds twelve and threepence per annum. At that rate you may burn coals and I will not grumble.'

'There is nothing like thrift, is there, master?'

'Ah,' said the Jew, 'talk of the beauties of nature! What I look to is the moral lessons it preaches. How many of your holiday-takers, who run over the sea cliffs, look at the thrift that covers them, and lay the flower to heart? I'm not one who approves of hoarding. Hoarding is a low and savage virtue, but Turning over is the cultured virtue. Turn your eggs and they don't addle, but they won't set. It is better with moneys. You can always restore the vital heat to them in your pocket, turn them over, and hatch out of them a pretty brood.'

Lazarus spread his hands before the fire, and the light played over his face. He smiled with satisfaction.

'The domestic circle,' said he to himself, or Joanna, or both, 'is a very pleasant circle to him who is its centre. I only passed through it as the man in the circus goes through a hoop, and mine was on fire, and singed me. Nevertheless, I won't say but——'

He did not finish his sentence, and Joanna did not trouble herself to inquire what he intended to say.

'I think a shave wouldn't do you harm,' she observed. 'There is a frowsy growth on your upper lip like a neglected plantation.'

'I'm going to grow a moustache,' said the Jew. 'I'm about to mark an epoch with it.'

'You—you going to make yourself ridiculous?'

'Not at all ridiculous. I've come to that period of life when a judicious growth of hair disguises the ravages of time.'

'Pray, what is the epoch to be marked by a moustache?' asked the girl.

Instead of answering the question directly, he sighed, stretched his legs and arms, and said, 'I'm a lone, lorn widower.'

'That ought not to trouble you much,' observed Joanna. 'You've been a grass widower long enough.'

'That is just it, Joanna,' said the Jew; 'I've been in grass so long that I should like now to get into clover.'

'Do you think of retiring from business?' asked the girl.

'Oh dear, no! I couldn't live without it.'

'Then you will allow me to spend more on housekeeping?'

He shook his head and hitched his shoulders uneasily. 'I'm not inclined to launch out far yet,' he said, with an intonation on the last word. 'The time will soon come when it will be otherwise. I am going to foreclose on those Kingsbridge people. What is more, I've been about and seen some of the other mortgagees, and given them such a scare that I've no doubt they will do the same. I've got it into the Society papers, Joanna—published to the world that the great ironclad Duke is foundering. The beauty of my position is that I strike at the heart. I have my hold on Court Royal itself. They will sell anything rather than that; and if they once begin to sell, it will go like a forest on fire—there will be no stopping it.'

'They will be beyond your reach when the marriage takes place,' said Joanna.

'I have put a spoke in that wheel. The marriage is broken off.'

Joanna was sincerely distressed. 'I wish I had done nothing for you. I wish—I wish I had not!'

'You have done everything for me,' said Lazarus. 'Through you I have ascertained who are the mortgagees, and who hold the bills, and I have been able to see and scare them all. Even the insurance company, that has the heaviest mortgage of all, is made uneasy. You may depend upon it, I have taken the pillars between my arms, and brought down the house upon the Philistines.'

Joanna burst into tears.

'There, there,' said the Jew, 'you have been dazzled and bewitched by those aristocrats, like so many others. It is a short enchantment that will soon pass. Joanna, we will have a bloater for supper. Eh? soft roe! eh?'

Joanna held down her head, and the tears dropped on the work on which she was engaged. Lazarus looked at her with a peculiar expression in his eyes. Then he began to whistle plaintively to himself Azucena's song in 'Trovatore,' 'Homeward returning to our green mountain.'

Presently the girl looked up, saw him watching her, and something in his expression offended her, for she coloured, and said, 'I did not know you were musical.'

'I'm what you may call a many-sided man,' answered the

Jew, full of prismatic twinkle and colour. 'You've only seen me under one aspect, and that the business one—appraising goods, whacking little boys, and scolding you. But there is more in me than you suppose. You've thought me hard, may be, but I'm like a sirloin of beef—I have my tender undercut. You've thought me cold, because I'm not given to blaze and crackle with emotion and sentiment, but I'm a slow combustion stove, lined with firebrick, and when alight I give out a lot of heat for my size. There are some men like the greengage—all sweetness without, but the heart within is stony. There are others like the walnut, rugged and hard as to their exterior, but nutty and white and delicious when you get at their insides. Such, Joanna, am I.'

'I've never tasted the nuttiness yet,' said the girl.

'But it is there.' He shook his head. 'Wait till my moustache is grown, and that Kingsbridge pack of cards is tossed about, and you'll see wonders.'

'I want to see no more of you than I am forced to,' she muttered.

'Oh, Joanna, don't say that! I suppose now, taking all in all, that you have got a certain amount of liking for me.'

'What do you mean by "taking all in all"? Do you mean taking your heap of greasy, patched clothes, and your frowsy face, and your long and dirty finger-nails, and your stingy habits, and the way you smack your lips over food that is palatable, and the way in which you are ogling me now—taking all this together I have a liking for you? No, nothing of the kind.'

'Why do you say these offensive things, Joanna? We belong to each other like a pair of stockings; one can't go on without the other.'

'I think I could shift without you,' said Joanna. 'There is the bell; some one is at the door.'

A moment after Charles Cheek's voice was heard in the passage.

'Is the boss in? I want to see him. Not but what I wanted to see you also, Joanna; but that is a permanent craving.'

'Here is Mr. Lazarus,' said the girl, ushering the young man into the kitchen. 'I've put him on a smock to keep him respectable.'

'What do you want with me?' asked Lazarus, with lowering brow and without a salutation.

'This is a civil reception, is it not?' exclaimed the young man. 'What else can I want of you but money? I am cleaned out, and desire accommodation till my father relaxes. He is out of humour just now, and will send me no more than my allowance. As if a young fellow of spirit could live within his allowance!'

'Why did you not come to my office at a proper time?' asked Lazarus, almost rudely.

'Because money-lending and money-taking are proper to you at all times.'

'I can let you have no more. You have had abundance, and I shall lose what I have lent already.'

'How much is that?'

'I cannot tell till I have looked.'

'Well, go and see.'

Lazarus rose reluctantly from his chair, and, taking a candle, lit it at the fire and went to his room. When Joanna saw that he was gone she drew near to Charles Cheek, and looking up in his face with a grave expression said, 'Do not come here after money. Lazarus will ruin you.'

'But I must have money. If my father will not find it, I must obtain it elsewhere.'

'When did you see your father last?'

'A century ago.'

'Why do you see him so seldom?'

'Because I am not partial to lectures on extravagance.'

'You deserve them. Go to your father; tell him the truth; promise him to be more prudent.'

'No use, Joanna. I cannot be prudent. It is not in me. I must spend, just as the sun emits light and the musk fragrance.'

'Neither of these exhausts itself. You must not, you must not, indeed, come to Lazarus. I know how this works. In seven years I ought to know. It brings inevitably to ruin, and I would not have you come to that.'

'Why not, Joey?'

'Because I like you, Charlie.'

Both laughed. His impertinence had been met and cast back in his face.

'Upon my word, Joanna, I wish you could take me in hand and manage me; then something might be made out of me.'

'I cannot take that responsibility on me. I turn coats,

not those who wear them. But I can advise you. I do entreat you to listen to me. I speak because you have been kind to me, and I do not meet with so much kindness as to be indifferent to those who show it me. I would like to see you out of Lazarus's books. You can give him no security —only your note of hand. Do you consider what interest he takes on that? There—go home, see your father, tell him what you want; make no promises if you are too weak to keep them.'

'I wish you would let me come here sometimes and ask you what I am to do when in a hobble. You have brains.'

'Do what I ask you now, and you may. It is vain to expect help if you will not follow advice.'

'Upon my word,' said the young man, 'I wish it were possible for me to make you Mrs. Charlie Cheek, and then, maybe, you would be able to make a man of me.'

'Not possible,' said Joanna.

'Why not?'

'The material is not present out of which to make a man.'

Then both laughed, but Charles Cheek laughed constrainedly, and coloured. She had cut him to the quick, but the cut did him good. He was a kindly, easy-disposed young man, without guile, marred by bad bringing up. He had one rare and excellent quality: he was humble and knew his own shortcomings. Joanna was wrong. With that, the making of a man was in him. Had he been conceited, it would not.

'How much do you want?' asked Lazarus, entering. He had heard them laugh, and supposed they had made a joke about him.

'Nothing,' answered the young man. 'I have changed my mind. I'll try my father again before I come to you, Blood-sucker!'

CHAPTER XXXIX.

OVER A SNAIL.

'Well, Joe, flourishing?'

'Middling, Charlie.'

Joanna was seated in the shop of the Golden Balls next day behind the counter, engaged on her needlework, when

Charles Cheek came in, and swung the door behind him, so that it clashed and jarred the glass.

'You must not be violent,' said Joanna, 'or the breakages will go down to your bill along with the silk gown and the necklace. Why have you not gone to your father as you promised?'

'I am ashamed to appear before him,' answered young Cheek. 'If I tell him the truth he will kick me out of the house, and not pay my return ticket.'

'Do you want a large sum?'

'I lost my money in a way I daren't confess. My governor is a man of a practical turn of mind, and will insist on particulars. I am bad at invention, and if I begin to tell lies he will find me out, and be down on me like the steam-hammer at the docks!'

'Then tell him the truth. That always answers, for no one believes it.'

'I cannot. The case is too gross. This did it.' He drew a snail-shell from his pocket, and set it on the counter. 'Will you deal with me for this article? It is a curiosity, and a costly one. It cost me a hundred pounds.'

Joanna took up the snail-shell, and turned it about, then put it down contemptuously. 'There is nothing particular about this shell except its size.'

'Yes, there is. She is a racer. I lost a hundred pounds on her. I cannot tell my father that. I was proud of my snail, too, and now she is either dead or sulky. She has not put out her head since I lost my money on her.'

'How did you manage that?'

'By racing, I tell you.' Charles Cheek jumped on the counter and seated himself on it, close to Joanna.

'Will you take a chair?' she asked.

'No, thank you. This is my only chance of getting you to look up to me. I am going to tell you about my snail.' He thrust the shell before her. 'Do look at this beast. She has lost me a hundred pounds.'

Joanna continued sewing, without looking off her work.

'Joe,' he said, 'what do you think of that?'

'I had rather be the snail than you.'

'I will tell you how it was. Captain Finch and I have played a good deal together of late at billiards, and we have also raced our snails. His is a very good runner. His regiment is under orders for India; so we resolved to have a final

trial between our snails for double or quits. Mine started right enough, but became lazy, and I touched her. When I did that, the snail, instead of running the faster, retreated within her shell. I was frightened, and applied the lighted end of my cigar to the shell. She ought to have rushed out, but, instead, went into sulks. She has not put out her horns since. Joe, you ought to sympathise with me and help me; I had christened my racer after you.'

'My name is not Joe.'

'My snail was called Joanna.'

'Why did you name a snail after me? It was no compliment.'

'I called her after the jolliest girl I knew. I had to give her a name, and I could think only of you at the time. I can't tell my governor the story of the snail, can I? Invent me something to take its place.'

Joanna shook her head. 'I cannot do that,' she said gravely; 'I never tell a lie to Lazarus. If ever I see my mother again, I will be true to her in every word I utter. You must be true to your father. Whom can we be true to except our own parents? As for the public'—her lips curled with scorn—'there is no sin in lying to them. They love lies as rats love aniseed. Put your snail in water, and she'll put out her head.'

'I never thought of that. Give me a saucer and water, and we will try. I dare say she is as dry as a sermon.'

Joanna complied with his request. No customer came into the shop just then; had one come, he would have seen two young heads bowed over a saucer with a little water in it, watching a snail. The one head was fair, the other dark; the one face good-natured, feeble, the other full of character and intelligence. Both pleasant in appearance; the young man good-looking, the girl beautiful; he with almost boyish simplicity, she with womanly shrewdness.

'She is stirring, by Jove!' exclaimed Charlie Cheek.

'I said she would. I am never mistaken.'

'It was a case of double or quits,' explained the young man; 'that is how I came to lose so much. There was a matter of fifty pounds between us, so when Finch proposed double or quits on a snail race, I said "Done!"'

'And done you are,' said Joanna. 'The snail was wiser than you. When burnt, she retired from the contest, and you persevered.'

'There comes her head,' exclaimed Cheek.

'Yours is to come,' said Joanna.

'Don't be hard on me, Joe ; I shall get bad words enough from my father. He is a rough man, and lets his tongue play, and his tongue is a lash of iron. I confess to you—I would to no one else—I am ashamed of myself ; I am too weak. I can't say No to a fellow.'

'You are like the jelly-fish, carried ashore by the tide; where the tide leaves them they lie, and dissolve away into nothing.'

'You are hard on me.'

'Is it not so? A man should have backbone or he is nothing. I was cast up by the tide, but I am solid.'

'It is easy for you to talk. You have a head. I only wish you were my sister, to be always at my elbow.'

'Last night you lamented that I was not your wife. Which do you mean?'

The young man coloured and fidgeted. He drew his head away ; it had been in close proximity to hers, over the saucer.

'Of course I am joking,' he said.

'What, now, or last night?' She laughed, then said, 'See! I have frightened you by pretending to take your words as earnest. Do not be alarmed. I do not desire responsibility for a man, in either capacity, who is unable to care for himself.'

'But—Joanna! this shall be my last folly. I solemnly swear it. You are the only person I know who has spoken plainly to me—except my father, and he makes me mad, he hurts me. If ever I am disposed to give way when I ought to be firm, I'll remember the jelly-fish.'

He spoke in a tone of hurt pride and real distress. Joanna put forth her hand and grasped his, whilst her face shone with pleasure. 'That is right,' she said cheerily. 'It does my heart good to hear you speak thus. If you want to give me the greatest of pleasures, it will be to let me know that you have kept your word, for, in spite of your weakness, I do like you. Moreover, to prove to you that I have confidence in you, I will help you now. You shall have the hundred pounds in a week.'

'How will you get it?' asked the young man. 'Not from Lazarus, surely.'

'No,' she replied, looking grave, 'I would not for the world apply to him to lend it to me.'

'Whence is it to come? Not from your wages, saved?'

'I receive no wages, I am a pawn.'

'A hundred pounds! You will obtain that for me?'

'You shall know about it to-morrow. To-morrow you go to your father.'

'I will go, certainly. How will you find the hundred pounds?'

'Never mind. It shall be done to restore the credit of my name, as the snail bears it.'

'I wish you would tell me how it is to be got.'

'No, you will find out in time. I am not doing this for you, but for the sake of the snail that bears my name.'

'Thank you, Joanna; you said something different when you made the offer. I *must* pay Captain Finch before he sails; a debt of honour is binding and must be paid, a debt to a tradesman may. If I had been unable to find the money, I think I should have destroyed myself.'

'No,' said the girl, shaking her head. 'To do that demands a firmer character than you have got. How would you have done it, pray?'

'I do not know. I dare say I should have jumped into the sea.'

'That is bad,' said Joanna; 'I have tried it.'

'What is good?'

'There must be some easy way of slipping out of life when life becomes unendurable.'

'Oh yes. The simplest of all is laudanum. That sends you to sleep, and you sleep away into the never-ending slumber.'

'Repeat the name.'

'What on earth can you want with laudanum? You are not tired of existence, I suppose?'

Joanna said nothing.

'Oh, look at the snail!' exclaimed the young man. 'She is getting out of the saucer, she is lively again. I might race her again and win back my hundred pounds.'

'No,' said Joanna, 'you have done with these follies. Life is serious, Mr. Cheek. It is a time for making money, not of throwing it away. I wish you had some of the monokeratic principle in you.'

The young man started from the counter, and coloured to the roots of his hair. 'What do you know of that?' he asked sharply. 'I hate the sound, and now it issues from your lips.'

'Why should you hate it? It has been the means of making a fortune.'

'It is a trouble to me. I suppose the officers I associate with know about my father, or I suspect they do, and every allusion to a unicorn cuts into me as if the beast itself were driving its horn between my ribs. There it is, plastered on every hoarding, with the inscription "Try Cheek's Monokeratic System."'

'I am sorry to have offended you. I do not see why you should dislike to hear of that which has made you.'

'Wait, Joanna, till you are near the top of the tree, and then the words Golden Balls will drive you frantic.'

'Maybe,' said Joanna, 'though I do not see why it should. But to return to what I was speaking about before you interrupted me. To my thinking you are leading an altogether unworthy life. Life is a time for making money.'

'Only for those born without it,' said the young man. 'My father has amassed a large fortune. It will be mine some day, no doubt. It is hard that I should be limited to a beggarly four hundred per annum. You would not have me make more money. That would indeed be carrying coals to Newcastle.'

'No, but life has other objects for which a man may strive. There is position. Push for that. Your father is not a gentleman, but you can be one.'

'Well, I am working in that direction,' said Charles. 'I associate with officers, play billiards and cards, and ride and smoke and eat with them.'

'And lose money to them on snails.'

'Yes, all conduces to good fellowship. I am friends with those who would not meet my father. I have stepped from the counter to one of the shelves.'

'I am glad your life is not aimless,' said the girl. 'If you are striving for position I can respect you; an aimless life is to me despicable.'

'I cannot say that I have ever thought much about a purpose,' said Charles Cheek, 'still—I like to be with those who are my social superiors.'

'And sometimes to have a chat with such as me—your social inferior.'

'No doubt about that, Joe.'

'Well, Mr. Cheek, form a purpose, and drive hard after it.'

'Joe!' The young man reseated himself on the counter, in a graver, more meditative mood than was common with him.

'Joe, I should like to have a photograph taken of you. Have you been photographed at any time?'

She shook her head and laughed.

'You are a girl to make a fellow think and try to do better. I should like to have your picture.'

'I have had neither the time nor the money to waste on one,' she answered.

'The money is nothing. Will you shut up shop for half an hour and come with me to the photographer? I will pay the damage.'

'I can close. It is now noon, and no business will be done at dinner-time. But I will consent on one condition only.'

'Any condition you like to make.'

'Let us three be taken in a group.'

'What three? You, Lazarus, and I?'

'No, certainly not. You, I, and the snail.'

'By all means. Immortalise my folly. I also will make a stipulation: will you grant it?'

'What is it? I am not like you. I do not offer blank cheques.'

'Let us be taken holding hands. Just now, when I promised to amend, you flashed out with such a smile, and took my hand and said, "That is right!" It sent a rush of blood to my heart, and I felt as if I had conquered the world. Let us be taken together, holding hands over the snail, and then I shall be nerved to keep my resolution. If disposed to break it, I shall look on the picture and blush.'

'I consent. Promise me,' said Joanna, looking down and speaking slowly, 'that you will not be angry with me whatever you may hear to-morrow. If you are in trouble yourself, do not doubt but that I also shall have to go through humiliation before I can get the money.'

'From whom will you get it?'

'Never mind.'

'But I do mind. You won't do anything wrong, Joe, even for me?'

'For the snail, you mean.'

'I should never forgive myself if you got into trouble. I *do* respect you. There is not another girl in the world I think of or care for as you.'

CHAPTER XL.

CHEEK SENIOR.

CHARLES CHEEK was on his way to town next day in an express second-class smoking carriage of the Great Western Railway. He would have gone first, but his funds would not allow the extravagance. At the Kingsbridge Road station the door of the carriage was opened, and an elderly gentleman dashed in, drawing after him his portmanteau, then signalling through the window when the train was in motion that he had forgotten his bundle of rugs and umbrella on the platform. A porter picked them up, ran after the train, and thrust them through the window, knocking the cigar out of Charles Cheek's mouth and inflicting a dent on his hat.

'Very sorry, upon my word,' said the owner of the articles. 'When travelling one is liable to lose one's goods.'

'Seeing that you have but your head, portmanteau, and bundle of rugs, the exertion of recollecting them cannot be excessive.'

'I never travel if I can help it,' said the other. 'I had just time to throw a shilling to the porter, but as I was agitated I don't know where it went and whether he saw it. Perhaps it fell under the rails and is flattened. When I am hot and flurried my sight fails me and my hand shakes. It does not matter. I will give the man another shilling on my return. Lord bless me! I have got into a smoking carriage. Never mind, I do smoke—for once in my life I am lucky. May this be an omen that my journey will be prosperous! Sometimes I have got into a first class when I had a second-class ticket, and then had to pay the difference. Sometimes I have tumbled into a third class when I had paid fare by second, but the company never refunded. Why, bless my heart! Surely I know your face; you are the image of your sainted mother, and have the Worthivale look about your eyes and mouth—more than has my cross boy Beavis. Surely I am speaking to Mr. Charles Cheek?'

'That is my name, sir, and have I the honour——'

'Of meeting a relative. Your mother was my first cousin. I hear you have been at Plymouth. It is really too bad that you have never been near us. Only a pleasant cruise to Kingsbridge from Plymouth.'

'You have not invited me, sir. Are you Mr. Worthivale?'

'The same. Steward to his Grace the Duke of Kingsbridge We have a nice little place, Court Royal Lodge, and would have been proud to see you in it. I did not invite you? Bless my soul! how careless of me! I have intended to do so, and tied knots in my pocket-handkerchief several times to remind me to write; but when I came to find the knot I always recollected some omissions in my duty to his Grace, and thought the knot was tied in reference to that. You must excuse my neglect. I am so overwhelmed with business that I have no time to think of private affairs. You may be sure that you would always be welcome at the Lodge.'

'I dare say you have much to occupy you now,' said Charles Cheek. 'There is much talk in Plymouth about the break-up in the Duke's affairs. I hear they are in a very ugly mess.'

'Mess!' exclaimed Mr. Worthivale, bridling; 'mess is not a word that is seemly in such connection. A duke's affairs may become embroiled, an earl's involved, an ordinary squire's may fall into confusion, but only a tradesman's can get into a mess. There has been agricultural depression felt in the Midlands and in the east of England, where much corn is grown, and some of the great landowners have had to retrench, and the smaller have been reduced to difficulties; but here it is not so. A duke is something very different from a country squire.'

Not a trace of a blush appeared on the steward's face as he told this lie. He was a man of scrupulous integrity, but to save the honour of the house he served he was ready to say anything—who can tell?—even do anything. Mr. Worthivale, who told this falsehood, was actually on his way to town to see the father of Charles Cheek, the wealthy tradesman, and to try to inveigle him into lending money to relieve the distress of the family. He had written to Crudge, as agent for Mr. Emmanuel, requesting him to call at his house on a certain day. He had written to the other mortgagees, who were anxious and troublesome, to pacify them with words if possible. And the words he had used to them were not strictly true. He was not satisfied that Emmanuel, and Emmanuel alone, would be satisfied with only promises. He had tortured his brains for many nights with schemes for raising money without a sale of property. All at once a brilliant idea flashed into his mind. He recollected Mr. Cheek, of the monokeratic system, who had married his pretty and sweet cousin, a Worthivale. He had not met Cheek since the funeral of Mrs. Cheek, but he knew about him

and his son from the correspondence of relatives. He had not taken a liking to Mr. Cheek, who was a man of modern ideas, without patience with Conservatives and Churchmen, and held advanced ideas about the land laws and the extension of the franchise, and cried out for Disestablishment and the abolition of the House of Lords. Mr. Worthivale had heard also of young Charles, a careless, extravagant dog, who gave his father much trouble. Mr. Cheek had wished his son to enter the business, and had forced him, when he left school, to occupy a stool in the office, but Charles in an hour threw the accounts into such confusion that it took his father days to unravel them; and although he was tried in various departments of the establishment, he proved such a failure in all that his father was fain to let him go his own way. Charles had desired to enter the army, but Mr. Cheek would not hear of this, and battled against his son's inclination till the young man was past the age at which he could obtain a commission. Then only did he admit to himself that he had made a mistake. In the army Charles would have had a profession and something to occupy him, and he seemed fit for no other profession, and to care for no other occupation. The father proposed that he should read for the Bar, but the disinclination of Charles for legal studies soon manifested itself. For medicine he was too thoughtless, and Mr. Cheek was forced to let him live as an idler. The father had been so accustomed to work, and to associate work with the first duty of man, even though that work was to throw dust in the eyes of the public, that it was with the utmost reluctance that he consented to find Charles an income of four hundred a year, and to let him live as he liked, associating with officers, losing money to them, entertaining them, and being laughed at by them behind his back. Charles had got into trouble several times, and his father had paid his debts, each time with angry reproaches and threats of disinheritance.

Worthivale had heard that the elder Cheek had amassed a large fortune, which his son's extravagance might impair but could not exhaust. He had taken it into his head that nothing would be easier for him than to persuade old Mr. Cheek to lend the necessary thousands for the saving of the Duke. This was the new web of fancy spun by his hopes, attached to no probabilities, floating in his brain like the gossamer of autumn; and in this vain hope he was on his way to town.

'I am going to drop in on your father,' said Mr. Worthi-

vale. 'I cannot think of going to town without looking him up. It is many years since we met, and when we get old we cling to old acquaintances. Are you going directly home? If so, tell him I shall turn up.'

'Oh no! I shall put up at an hotel. I am not so keen after the shelter of the paternal wing.'

'I rather want to see your father this evening. I have so much business to occupy my day that I can ill spare other time. Am I likely to find him at home of an evening?'

'Sure to catch him. He never goes to the theatre or concerts. You could not wring five words out of him during business hours. I shall not drop in on him to-morrow till after the Monokeros has drawn in his horn.'

'If that be so,' said the steward, 'I will take a cab after I have had my dinner and go to him. It is as well that we should not be there together; he and I will like to have a chat over old times—times before you were born.'

Accordingly, on reaching town, Mr. Worthivale drove to his inn, ordered a simple dinner, and when he had done, took a hansom to his destination.

Mr. Cheek had just dined, and was lingering over his glass of wine when the steward was announced. He told the servant to show Mr. Worthivale in to him in the dining-room. This was a large apartment with a red flock paper on the walls, and a Turkey carpet on the floor. The furniture was of heavy mahogany, polished, his chairs covered with red leather. The window-curtains were of red rep. Against the walls hung some large engravings—Landseer's dog looking out of a kennel, the Newfoundlander lying on a quay, Bolton Abbey in the olden time—pictures every one has seen and knows as he knows the airs of 'Trovatore' and the taste of peppermint.

Over the fireplace was a looking-glass; on the table were oranges, almonds, raisins, and mixed biscuits. Everything was in the room that was to be expected; nothing there that was unexpected. Tottenham Court Road had furnished it. A man's room reflects his mind. Everything there was solid, sound, and commonplace.

Mr. Worthivale had no time to look round him. He ran forward and effusively shook hands with Mr. Cheek, who rose ceremoniously, and received his greeting without great cordiality, but with civility.

'Take a chair, Worthivale; glad to see you. Have port or sherry? If you prefer claret I will have some decanted.

Don't drink it myself. Take an orange or—raisins. I will ring and have some more almonds brought in. I have eaten most. Take some biscuits ; you will find a ratafia here and there under the others. I have eaten those on the top. I hope you are well. I have not seen you for twelve years and a half.'

'So much as that ? You do not say so !'

'You have not visited me since my wife's death.'

'I may retort on you. I live in the country. You Londoners need a holiday. Why have you not fled the fogs and smoke, and come to me for sea air and the landscape of South Devon ?'

'I never take a holiday. Can't afford it. Work always goes on, and always needs my presence. When the Londoners leave town, the country folk come up, and purchase for the ensuing year.'

Mr. Cheek was a heavily built man, with a long head and face, the latter flat, with a nose sticking out of it, much as the Peak of Teneriffe pokes out of the sea—led up to by no subsidiary elevations, abrupt, an afterthought. His eyebrows were black, but his hair was grey, and disposed to retreat from the temples, which were highly polished. He wore a grey thick Newgate collar, a black frock coat, black trousers, black waistcoat relieved by a heavy gold chain, a good deal of white shirt front, turned-down collars, necessitated by the Newgate fringe, and a black tie. He always smelt of black dye, for his cloth clothes were always new and glossy and uncreased. He had a trick of stretching his arms with a jerk forward at intervals, exposing much cuff, acquired from wearing new coats that were not easy under the arm. His eyes were dark and penetrating, his lips firm. From his nostrils two very dark creases descended to the corners of his mouth, like gashes in which lay black blood. The old man seemed very lonely in his dining-room, without a companion with whom to exchange ideas, and only a choice between almonds and raisins, ratafias, and macaroons, but he did not seem to feel it ; as he ate and drank he schemed fresh plans for making money, and that was his delight. A companion would have discussed less profitable and interesting topics.

Worthivale spent an hour with old Cheek, telling him about himself, his position at Court Royal, the splendour of the Kingsbridge family, the virtues of the Duke, and Lord Ronald and the Marquess, and the unapproachable charms of Lady Grace.

The steward went on to talk about the estates, the prospect

of making a second Torquay out of Bigbury Bay, of the chance of converting the creek of Kingsbridge into a harbour, of the building stone on the estates, of the shale from which petroleum might be extracted, of the slate quarries that only needed opening out and connecting with the sea by a line to supply and roof in the whole south coast of England.

Mr. Cheek had listened with indifference to the enumeration of the merits of the members of the noble house, but when the steward touched on speculative ventures his interest was excited. He ate all the almonds off the raisin dish as fast as he could chew them, and then rang to have the dish replenished.

Mr. Worthivale hinted that his Grace was in need of temporary accommodation, owing to the extravagance of his ancestors and the calling up of some of the mortgages, and he suggested that a better and safer investment for floating capital could not be found.

Mr. Cheek listened with close attention, but said nothing. Such investments apparently possessed no attraction for him. The steward, with all his eloquence, had made no way.

Nevertheless, Worthivale did not abandon hope. The wealthy tradesman had not disputed the feasibility of his schemes, had not said, in so many words, that he would have nothing to do with the mortgages.

Then the conversation drifted to young Charles. Mr. Worthivale said that he had come to town with him.

'I know what he wants—money,' said the father, with imperturbable countenance. 'Never made a penny himself.'

'I am afraid he gives you a good deal of trouble,' said the steward.

'Fine fellow,' answered old Cheek. 'Good looks. Ready address. A figure. No Devonshire twang. Can't get the R's and the U's right myself. Never shall. Grāss is long grāss with me, never cropped grăss.'

'Charles is a very pleasant-looking fellow,' said Mr. Worthivale, 'the image of his dear mother.'

'Mentally, morally, physically,' acquiesced the trader; 'can't expect every man to take to business.'

'No,' said Mr. Worthivale; 'it is born in some, not in others, like an ear for music, a taste for sport, and a hand for carving a goose.'

'Suppose so,' said Mr. Cheek.

'It takes two generations to make a gentleman,' reasoned

Mr. Worthivale, 'and even then—there always remains lurking in the system a *je-ne-sais-quoi*.'

'A what?' exclaimed Mr. Cheek, looking frightened. 'Is it in the skin?'

'Only a French expression,' exclaimed the steward.

'Never understood other than one foreign word, and that—monokeratic, for which I paid five guineas,' said Mr. Cheek. 'I wanted a suitable word, I went to an Oxford scholar, and said, find me the word, and I'll find you a five-pound note and five shillings. That's how I came by it.'

Neither spoke. The steward was peeling an orange. Presently Mr. Cheek began to move uneasily in his chair, to swell and puff. Then out came a confidence. 'Charles is a trouble to me. I fill the barrel, and when I'm gone he'll turn the tap and let it run. No fortune can stand a running tap. I wish I knew how to cure him. This consciousness takes the taste out of my profits. It is like eating bread from which the salt is omitted in the making.'

'Take my advice,' said Worthivale; 'mix him in good society. He hangs about a garrison town for the sake of the officers, but he never associates with the better class of officers, only with those who like his dinners, and bleed him at billiards. He never sees the ladies, and it is ladies who humanise, civilise, and refine.'

'Can't do it. I'm not in society myself. Shop stands in the way.'

'I wish I could persuade him to come to Court Royal Lodge, and pay me a long visit. I could introduce him to people of the first quality, and show him something better than gambling officers and fast ladies. You will never do anything with him, Cheek, till you have put him in a situation where his better qualities may be drawn out, and he may learn to blush at his weaknesses.'

'If he were up here in town,' said the father, scratching his nose meditatively with a stalk of raisins, 'it might be done—by paying. Some quality people do come to my shop. They don't put on their best bonnets and come in their own carriages when they do, but I know 'em. A long bill might be forgiven some lady of rank and fashion if she would invite Charles to dinner or a dance—such things are done—just to give him the chance of putting his foot into high society. If he were once in, Charlie could maintain himself there. Society would want him when it had seen him. I wouldn't mind

paying, but it can't be done. Charlie cares only for officers, and is either at Portsmouth or Plymouth, befooled by them out of his—my money.'

'Send him to me.'

'I don't suppose he would care for the country. Nothing to be done there.'

'He can see the magnificent grounds. He can boat. He can shoot.'

'Grounds anywhere. Mount Edgcumbe open to public on Wednesdays. Boating to be had at Plymouth. This is not the time of year for shooting.'

'True. Let him come to me in the shooting season.'

'Many months to that. Meantime he may have gone to the bad.'

'I invited him to-day to visit me, and he did not decline.'

'Too much of a gent for that,' said the father. 'Mischief is he can't say Nay. He will promise you a call, and never go. I know him. He promises reform every time he comes for money, but never reforms.'

'He is entangled in a social stratum—a sort of Bohemianism, that will not allow him to reform. Get him out of that, and he will be another man. My Beavis never gives me an hour's concern, because he associates with the family at Court Royal. The Marquess loves him as a brother. Beavis would do your boy an infinity of good. Beavis is a fine, strong-willed, honourable fellow, with a tender heart and a true conscience.'

'Charlie, also, is a fine fellow,' said old Cheek, who could not endure to have another young man contrasted favourably with his own son. 'The mischief is, I was too busy all my days, and could not see enough of him. Only wants his chance now.'

'Well,' said Worthivale, standing up, 'I must be off now. Good-bye, Cheek. It is a real pleasure to me to meet you again.'

'Dine with me the day after to-morrow. Seven punctually.'

'I shall be delighted.'

He left the old man sitting looking before him at the dish of biscuits from which he had exterminated the ratafias. Every now and then he turned over the biscuits with his finger, but his mind was not on the ratafias. He shook his long head at intervals, and said, 'If that were to happen—if Charlie were to be so weak as that—and he can't say No—least of all to a woman—he would be done for irretrievably.'

CHAPTER XLI.

AN ENTANGLEMENT.

When Charles Cheek came next evening to see his father, he found the old man in a condition of excitement such as made his heart sink, and despair of extracting money from him. He came at his father's dinner time, knowing the impossibility of getting a conversation with him during business hours.

'Are you unwell, father?' he asked, when he observed the perturbed condition of the old man.

'Unwell? Cause to be so.'

'What is the matter with you?'

'Matter? Everything.'

'Any annoyance lately?'

'Annoyance? Ugh!'

What was it that troubled the old man? During dinner he would hardly speak. His pasty face exuded a gloss. He growled, and cast furtive glances at his son, which Charles caught, and was unable to interpret.

'Was Mr. Worthivale here yesterday, governor?'

'Worthivale? Yes. Has a son, never gave him an hour's uneasiness. Came crowing and flapping here because he has a good son.'

'Do you mean, father, that—that——'

'That—that! Yes. Ugh!'

It was impossible to extract anything from the old man during the meal. Charles put on a gay manner, and talked of the weather, of politics, of the regiments ordered abroad, of the depression, of the gossip of society, the improvements effected in torpedoes, Devonshire cream, the Prince of Wales, butterine, Nihilism, Robert Browning, anything, everything that came into his head, but without provoking his father to take part in the conversation.

As soon, however, as the dessert was on the table—the same dessert as the day before—the father drew the dish of raisins and almonds over to himself, waved the servants to withdraw, and burst forth with, 'So—so—clapping the cross on top of St. Paul's! brought your folly to a climax at last. Ugh!'

'What have I done?' asked Charles, as his spirit quaked at his father's anger, and his consciousness of having deserved it.

'I know I am not as clever as you are, governor, but—you have put matters more forcibly than pleasantly.'

'What have you done? Look at this! Ugh!'

The old man flung a note across the table at him, then made a grab at the almonds, filled his hand, and began to eat them ravenously.

Charles took a letter out of the envelope, unfolded it leisurely, and proceeded to read. He expected to find that his tailor or wine merchant had appealed to his father for payment of a long-standing account. What he saw made the colour rush to his face, and turn him scarlet to the roots of his hair. He glanced up, and saw that his father had riveted his dark piercing eyes on him, whilst he ate savagely almond after almond. The letter was as follows :—

'Honoured and monokeratic Sir,—I take my pen in hand, hoping that this finds you as it leaves me. Sir, I feel that I can have no peace of mind till I make you acquainted with our engagement, that is, the engagement of me and Charlie, and ask your blessing on our approaching union. When Charlie told me he wished I was his wife, you might have knocked me down with a feather, I was that taken aback. I could do no other than give consent, seeing he had behaved so handsome to me, in giving me a necklace of pearls and a beautiful rose-coloured silk gown (which, I am grieved to say, through no fault of mine, has since been injured by Ems water). Charlie and I have been cabineted together, holding hands as agreed and acknowledged lovers, and we only await your blessing, honoured and monokeratic sir, to become the happiest of couples. Charlie has gone up to town to break the news to you, and to solicit your approval. He will tell you of our long attachment, and assure you of my best intentions to love and honour you as a daughter, the which (in prospective) I beg to subscribe myself,

'JOANNA ROSEVERE.

'C/o Mr. Lazarus,
'The Golden Balls,
'Barbican.

'P.S.—I will send you our united cabinet as soon as the proof comes, which I trust will be to-morrow.'

Charles Cheek's first sensation was amazement; then he felt disposed to laugh. The letter was so droll, so impertinent, and so inferior in style to what he expected from Joe. But all inclination to laugh was taken from him by his father's

countenance. The old man was simmering with anger and apprehension.

'Thought so!' burst forth Mr. Cheek as he stretched his arms so suddenly and violently as to knock over one of the wine-glasses. 'I always feared it would come to this. I hoped against hope. I did trust you would be preserved by Providence from plunging into such an abyss of imbecility.'

'My dear father, you take this too seriously.'

'Take it too seriously!' echoed the old man. 'What is more serious than marriage!'

'But, my dear governor!'

'Don't governor me. I'm your father, I presume, though God forgive me for begetting such an ass.'

The young man was hurt and incensed. His father loved him, but he was rough with him, and had no self-restraint when angered. He spoke coarsely, brutally, all the coarse and brutal things that came off his heart, which is never done by those who have been put through the mill of culture.

How much the old man loved him, how proud he was of him in spite of his weakness, in spite of the disappointment his pride had encountered, this Charles did not know. Mr. Cheek made no show of affection; or he showed it by licking his cub with a very rough tongue, so rough as to flay him.

'Well!' shouted the old man, 'well!'

'The letter is preposterous,' said Charlie, sulkily.

'Preposterous! What I find preposterous is not the letter, but the conduct that provoked the letter.'

'It is not true—it is a hoax,' said the young man.

'Not true!' repeated the old man. He had eaten all the almonds; now he took a bunch of raisins, put it in his mouth, and passionately tore off the fruit with one nip of his teeth, and put the spray on his plate. When he had gulped down the raisins he said, 'Not true! oh no. Cap imbecility with falsehood. Now deny everything. I thought I had a son who was a fool; don't convince me that he is a liar and a coward as well.'

The young man stood up. He turned pale. 'You are my father,' he said, 'and have some privilege of language; but this exceeds what I will endure. I had rather break stones on the road than submit to such insults.'

'Rejoice to see you break stones—do any useful work. At present breaking your father's heart.'

The old man's voice shook.

Charles was moved. 'My dear father,' he said, 'let me explain.'

'Explain! What can you explain?'

'The letter is not serious.'

'Reads deuced like a serious letter.' Mr. Cheek had no sense of humour. What touched his son as comical in the epistle appeared to him sober earnestness. 'Answer me a few plain questions, Charles; set my mind at rest, or confirm my worst anticipations. Give me the letter.'

The old tradesman took the note and spread it before him, then deliberately put on his spectacles and read the letter over to himself, marking the points with his silver dessert knife.

'Who is Joanna Rosevere?'

'She is a girl I got to know something about; a nice enough sort of a girl, with plenty of brains——'

'That will do. I asked who was Joanna Rosevere. You say a girl. Enough. Now I know she is not a widow. I want none of your lover's raptures.'

'I am not aware that there were any raptures.'

'That will do. I require answers short and to the point. Now, further, is it true that you gave her a pearl necklace and a rose-coloured silk dress?'

'Yes, I did; the pearls were Roman, and the dress——

'That will do. You gave this girl a necklace of Roman pearls and a rose-coloured silk gown. Did you further have yourself photographed—I beg pardon, cabineted—hand-in-hand with her?'

'Yes, father. The fact is that—that——' Then the recollection of the snail and the bet rushed on his mind, he blushed and did not finish his sentence.

'Very well—or rather, very ill. You were photographed—to be exact, cabineted with the girl, hand-in-hand; I presume I take her right, she don't swear you were closeted with her.'

'Well, I was taken with her. I thought——'

'Never mind what you thought. I want facts, not fancies. Hand-in-hand, cabinet size. I want to know further, did you, as she says, tell her you wished her to be your wife?'

'It came about like this. The other evening when I was there——'

'I am not asking the time of day, nor the circumstances. I only ask, is this a fact?'

'I did say that I wished it were possible for me to make

her Mrs. Charles Cheek, or words to that effect. I don't recollect the exact expression.'

'Very well. You asked her to be Mrs. Charles Cheek, but the exact words in which you couched your proposal you do not recollect.'

'It was not a proposal.'

'Not a proposal!' repeated the father. 'Then what am I to conclude from the present of the necklace of Roman pearls and the rose-coloured silk dress, and the cabinet-sized photograph of yourselves clasping each other's hands? Will you illumine my mind, and tell me, do young gentlemen and young women get carted, and closeted, and cabineted, hand-in-hand, unless engaged?'

'There is no engagement,' protested Charles, bewildered and angry.

'No engagement! You dare to say that. Don't repeat it, as you desire to retain a particle of my regard. I ask, further, what is this Joanna? I know she is a girl. In what capacity is she at the Golden Balls with Mr. Lazarus, whom I happen to know?'

'She is maid of all work to the old Jew pawnbroker,' answered the young man, driven to desperation, and regardless what he admitted.

'Maid of all work to a Jew pawnbroker,' repeated his father. 'I ask besides, whence comes she? Is she a Jewess?'

'No, she is not.'

'Whence comes she?'

'Picked out of the mud, and pawned for ten shillings,' exclaimed Charles Cheek in a paroxysm of exasperation.

'Picked out of the mud. What mud?'

'The mud of Sutton Pool.'

'Pawned for ten shillings. By whom?'

'By her mother.'

'And this is the creature you are going to take to you as wife!' exclaimed the old man, with repressed anger, his face livid and syrupy with emotion. 'With a creature such as this you will squander my hard-earned wealth!'

'I tell you, father, it is a hoax.'

'Don't tell me that.' Mr. Cheek brought his great fist down on the table with a crash that made the decanters leap and the glasses spin. 'Now, sir, do you mean to marry her? If you do, I cast you off utterly and for ever.'

'No, I don't want to do that. I tell you the letter is a hoax. Read it—you can see by the style that it is.'

'I have read it. I can see as well as you. I am not to be hoodwinked, and to be told that red is green, and the moon is cheese, and believe it. I have listened patiently to your explanation. You have so compromised yourself with this girl, on your own admission, that if you fail, you render yourself actionable for breach of promise.'

'There was no promise,' persisted the young man.

'Is a jury likely to believe that, when they have heard of the pearls and the rose silk, and seen the billing and cooing doves in the cabinet? I tell you they will assess the damages at a thousand pounds.'

'There was no agreement. It is a mistake. I can't think what Joanna was at writing such a letter.'

'Do you want to marry her?' asked his father.

'No, of course not. I never did. I only said something about making her Mrs. Charles Cheek in joke.'

'The joke is likely to be expensive pleasantry. But it was no joke. You neither of you regarded it as joke, or you would not have been photographed together. Now you come to me to get you out of this predicament. I won't have the scandal of a case of breach of promise in the papers. It might affect my business. We must come to an accommodation. How old is the girl?'

'Seventeen or eighteen.'

'Has she relations to advise her?'

'Not one.'

'There is, however, that fox, Lazarus.'

'She will never consult him.'

'What will she take to let you off? I dare say if I go down with a hundred pounds in my pocket, and offer it her with one hand, and a written renunciation of you in the other, before she has had time to consider and ask advice, she will sign, and set you free.' He looked questioningly at his son.

A change had come over Charles's face. A light had sprung up before him. He leaned back in his chair, and burst into a fit of laughter.

'It is no laughing matter,' said the elder Cheek, grimly. 'This may cost us a thousand. Juries estimate damages by the income of the father-in-law. Deuced lucky you will be if I can clear you for a hundred? You know the girl: will she take a hundred?'

'I am sure she will. Give me the money, and let me go down to Plymouth and settle it with her.'

'No,' answered the father, 'you are too weak. The job must be done by me at once. Let me see—to-morrow : impossible, engaged. Must make arrangements. Day after, yes ; and, Charles, you go to Mr. Worthivale at Kingsbridge for a month, or better, six weeks, to be out of the way. He comes here to dinner to-morrow, when I will settle with him. Go.'

When Charles Cheek got into the street he exploded into laughter. 'The little rogue!' he exclaimed. 'Who ever would have thought it? The hundred pounds she promised she gets out of my father. She has cost me a bad quarter of an hour, though.'

CHAPTER XLII.

NIBBLING.

NEXT evening, punctually at seven, Mr. Worthivale arrived. To honour his presence, two additional dishes were added to the dessert—one of dried figs, the other of preserved ginger. Also a bottle of claret was decanted. Mr. Cheek had not settled down into his usual composure ; his excitement made him more talkative than usual, and induced him to fill out his sentences, and not present them in a somewhat less truncated shape. His talkativeness, however, did not manifest itself until after the servants had withdrawn. Then his reserve gave way. He pulled an envelope out of his pocket and threw it to his guest.

'Look at that, Worthivale! Got it this morning. Charles has made a fool of himself. Got entangled with a wench dredged from the social depths. Engaged! Cost something to set him free. However'—he rattled his pocket—'I'm not like one of your dukes ; I've money in my own pocket when there's need. I haven't to go cap in hand to others.'

The steward winced. Then he said, studying the photograph, 'I am sure I know that face. It is familiar to me. Where can I have seen it?'

'Of course. That is Charlie.'

'Yes ; but the other—the girl? She—it must be, yet I can hardly believe it—it must be our servant, Joanna!'

'Joanna is her name.'

'The maid left us under somewhat unsatisfactory circumstances—altogether puzzling.'

'That I can well believe.'

'She had been before with a Mrs. Delany.'

'She is now with a Jew pawnbroker, as maid of all work.'

'This must be broken off,' said Mr. Worthivale. 'I never quite made out the why and wherefore of her leaving my house. She ran away.'

'I am going to buy her off,' answered Mr. Cheek; 'but what comfort is that to me, when my boy may be committing a similar folly again to-morrow?'

Mr. Worthivale was still considering the photograph.

'Her face is striking,' he said, 'and she has eyes that sparkle; they are perfectly effervescing with intelligence. Beavis took against her; he suspected her from the outset, but I cannot say why. This is a very odd story. Your son's acquaintance with her must be short. She left us at Christmas. She was clever, but unable to read and write.'

'She wrote me a letter. I have it in my pocket—here it is. Almost ashamed, however, to let you see it.'

Mr. Worthivale looked at the letter. 'I know about the pink silk dress,' he said. 'She had it when she came to us. It was spoiled, as she describes in this letter, by some mineral water getting spilled over it. The Roman pearls also—yes. She sent them to Lady Grace Eveleigh after her disappearance. Lucy told me of it. They came with a letter, but I supposed she had got some one to write it for her. The girl is not lost to good; she showed great respect and attachment to her ladyship. Perhaps this letter was written for her; and yet'—he mused—'yet there were some odd circumstances about her departure which made Beavis think her ignorance simulated.'

'Did she steal anything from your house?'

'No, I cannot say we missed money or plate; in fact, nothing. No, I cannot charge her with that.'

'Sorry for that,' said old Cheek. 'It would have made my course easier. Police case then.'

'Your son must in no case marry such a person,' said the steward, gravely. 'It would be an ugly scandal.'

'He shall not. I buy her off. Allow the boy to visit you for a month or so till this affair is blown over.'

'Certainly. I will bring him into good society. The company of Beavis will be profitable. I may find means of introducing him to the Marquess and Lord Ronald. There are nice people in our neighbourhood. There are the Sheepwashes—some fine girls, much admired, and of good family. Who can tell? Charles may form an attachment for one of them, and

so get his foot into society. They have not much of their own except blood, and that is just what you require.'

'Nothing would please me better.'

'Yes, we must get Charles into good society, and then he will lose the taste for low associations.'

'The boy has his points,' said Mr. Cheek. 'Can't help loving him. Admire his gentlemanly ways. Got them from his mother. Your family have always been gentlefolks.'

'Yes; we were squires once, in Cornwall, but lost our property in the usual way, and went down into business.'

Then Mr. Worthivale turned the conversation to the Kingsbridge estates, and the advantages of lending money on them. He admitted that the Duke was in want of a few thousands, but then the investment was so secure. Turkish Government, Egyptian Khedives, Argentine Republics borrowed and could not pay. They were broken reeds, but an English duke was a pillar of strength. It would not be a bad excuse for introducing Charles to the family, if his father was inclined to accommodate it. At this bold proposition Mr. Cheek grew stiff, congealed, and frowned. The steward went on, now he had begun, unabashed, to show the great securities the duke could offer, the advantages from a pecuniary point of view that would accrue to Mr. Cheek by thus investing his money, Mr. Cheek listened, and said nothing in reply one way or the other.

'There are a couple of mortgages that have been notified which must be met, amounting to about fifty thousand,' he said. 'If you would take these over, it would be a convenience to the family, you would have a safe investment, and you would have conferred on them an obligation which they would not forget.'

'Fifty thousand!' said Mr. Cheek. I have more than that to dispose of, thank goodness; the Monokeratic Principle continues to bring in a good profit annually, and I must invest what I make somewhere and somehow.'

'Really,' said the steward, 'a hundred thousand would not come amiss.'

'Ah!' exclaimed Cheek senior, 'go on, hundred and fifty—two hundred—two hundred and fifty——'

'You do not hear me out. A couple of mortgages must be transferred or paid off. The Duke has not the ready money, and he would therefore wish the transfer. The one is on the manor of Kingsbridge, the other on the Court Royal estate. Why, the house itself cost seventy thousand—there is absolutely no risk.'

'If I were to take these over, it would be merely because I do not see my way at present to a better investment. When I do see one I shall call them up. I don't care for your four and half and four and three quarters. If I were to take these mortgages, your people would be put in the same box in a few years' time when I wanted to release my capital.'

'Oh, in two or three years that can be done without difficulty. The Duke only requires accommodation for the moment.'

'Whence will the money come?'

'Don't trouble your head about that. Money can always be found with such estates. Why, they bring in forty thousand per annum.'

'Land can always be sold,' said Cheek. 'If the money be not forthcoming when I want it, I will sell them up, or they must drop a farm or two into the market.'

'I'll tell you what, Cheek. If it ever comes to that, try and secure Bigbury. That is the site for a second Torquay, climate warm as Penzance, and not as rainy; looks south, scenery lovely, Plymouth accessible. He who has capital, and likes to spend it there, can realise in no time an enormous fortune. Come, what do you say to my proposal? You have a friend at court in me, who knows all the advantages.'

Mr. Cheek rubbed his nose with his fork, wherewith he had been eating preserved ginger, and left a trickle of juice upon it.

'I should like to see the place,' he said cautiously.

'Come down, then.'

Suddenly Cheek jerked forwards his arms, and said, 'I will.'

'And as I return to-morrow, I can take Charles with me, and get him settled in. I expect to see the agent for the mortgagee on the twenty-third at my place. Suppose you are there to meet him. Then nothing is more easy than a transfer.'

'I go down to Plymouth to-morrow to settle this unpleasant matter of the girl. We can travel together.'

'Then return by way of Kingsbridge.'

'Cannot. Must be in town by night express, but by Wednesday I'll be with you.'

Mr. Worthivale was delighted; the fish was nibbling and nigh hooked.

Neither spoke for some minutes, as each was engaged with his own thoughts and with drinking port.

Presently Mr. Cheek said, as he dipped his napkin in his finger-glass and wiped the syrup off his nose, 'I wish you would tell me what was suspicious about that girl who has

entangled Charles. If she has done anything to make her afraid of being found out, I might give her a scare, and bring her to an humble frame of mind. A knowledge of particulars will help me.'

The steward then related the circumstances.

'Beavis caught her making an analysis of the accounts!' exclaimed Mr. Cheek. 'Why, the thing is improbable on the face of it. What could such a girl want with it?'

'Nothing, that I can see. I said so to Beavis, but Beavis was very positive. She had the books out, she must have searched my pockets to get the key, and she had her head resting on the extracts she had taken. When Beavis roused her, she knocked over the lamp, and slipped her notebook away in the dark.'

'Did Beavis question her?'

'No; she bolted.'

'Bolted at once?'

'Yes; she did not wait to be questioned.'

'And she went——'

'We did not trace her. We had no idea whither she had betaken herself.'

'Now you know. She is with a Jew. Probably went straight to him. I know the man. He is a money-lender as well as a pawnbroker. There was a time when he helped me. Charles has been in his clutches before now. A dangerous man, worth more than you would fancy. Has he any interest in the affairs of the Duke?'

'None whatever.'

'Who are the holders of the mortgages? Have you their names? Are any Jews among them?'

'Yes, several.'

'Bad,' said Cheek. 'The Jews play into each other's hands, hook on to each other like the links of a fetter.'

'You do not mean to connect the act of the girl with the mortgagees?'

'I should not be surprised. I find no other explanation. Beavis thinks so, probably. She came to you pretending inability to read and write?'

'Yes.'

'The girl is no ordinary girl,' said Mr. Cheek, uneasily. 'I doubt if she will let off Charles as cheap as a hundred pounds. I must inquire into this matter. Must see Lazarus. Haven't seen or smelt him for years.'

'I don't see what Lazarus has to do with the matter. The girl came to me from Mrs. Delany. I suppose that after leaving me, and having no character, she was forced to take what situation she could.'

'Charles can tell us. I hear his voice in the hall. He must have known her before she went to you if she had the silk dress and beads in your house.—Charles,' he said as his son entered, 'catechising continued.'

The young man had recovered his buoyancy.

'By all means, father, but not in public.'

'Want to know whether that person you were talking of with me yesterday has been long in present situation.'

'All her life,' answered Charles, promptly. 'That is, since she was twelve years old.'

'Was she ever in service with a Mrs. Delany?'

'Wife of Colonel Delany,' explained Mr. Worthivale.

'Not to my knowledge; certainly not recently.'

'Where was she before Christmas?' asked the steward.

'That I cannot say. Possibly then she may have been at the Colonel's, but I do not know.'

'Where was she before that?' asked his father.

'On November the fifth she was at the Barbican, where she had been since childhood. She was away till Christmas, and then returned, and has been there ever since.'

Cheek looked at Worthivale and shook his head.

'Sent,' he said.

CHAPTER XLIII.

'SHARES?'

TIME was money to Mr. Cheek. He did not allow the grass to grow under his feet. Consequently, on reaching Plymouth he went at once to the Golden Balls. Mr. Cheek was a clear as well as a hard-headed man; he was a rapid thinker, and prompt in forming and acting on his decisions. He was one of those conquering men who conquer because dominated by self-assurance. He was headstrong and intolerant, because he was incapable of seeing from any other standpoint than his own, and of allowing that any other view was admissible. These are the heroes who have the world at their feet. What

he willed he had always been able to carry out, because he cared for no one who opposed him. The public was the ass on which he had ridden ever since he began business. He knew perfectly its moods and maladies. He was indifferent to its wants, save so far as they affected him and helped in his business. Humbug was with him a form of advertisement—a means to an end. He was not himself a humbug, he was even brutally straightforward, but the public demanded cant of the man who posed before them as a politician, a preacher, or a trader, and Mr. Cheek donned it. In his domestic relations he was truthful, honest, and direct; in his relations with the public he was perfectly unscrupulous. He had a code of ethics for dealings within his home circle, but that home circle was limited now, it was contained within his waistband; he had none at all for dealings outside. He was a hard man, but he had a tender point—love for and pride in his son, a love that met with little response because ill-expressed, and a pride that met with rude shocks. He was an ambitious man. For long his ambition had been to make money. Now he was ambitious to make Charles a gentleman. But he did not know how to set about it. He had sent him, as a boy, to private schools, and, despising the classics, had refused to put him at an university. From dread of losing him from under his eye, he had opposed his going into the army; now he was conscious that he had made a mistake, but too proud to admit it. He was angry with society for not taking up Charles into it. Why should it not? Every day he heard of society letting down its net and drawing it up into its heaven, like the sheet of St. Peter's vision, full of all sorts of strange beasts. Why was not Charles accepted? If society would not take up Charles, society must be cut down to his level.

He entered the shop of the Golden Balls with firm tread, and with his usual brusque and determined manner. Joanna was there. Towards dusk more business was done than at other times of the day. One gas jet was flaring near her head, accentuating her features. Mr. Cheek did not care in the least whether she was good-looking or the reverse. He looked at her no more than to satisfy himself that this was the same girl who had been photographed with his son.

'Your name is Joanna Rosevere,' he said.

Joanna stood up at once, and turned the gas so as to throw the light full on his face, and off her own.

'And you,' she said quietly—'you are Mr. Cheek of the Monokeratic Principle.'

'I received a letter from you on the 12th instant.'

'Which I posted on the 11th instant.'

'You have not a leg to stand on,' said Mr. Cheek, roughly. 'My son is a fool, but not such a fool as to propose to make you his wife. He swears he never asked you.'

She made no reply, but stood opposite him with her hands on the counter, her face in shadow, studying him.

'Now look here,' he said further: 'in an amicable way I don't mind squaring off. If you choose to fight, I'm your man, with thousands at my disposal, and quite prepared to chuck away thousands in law. What do you say?'

'Nothing.'

'Perhaps you suppose that law in England is made for the purpose of redressing wrongs. No such thing. Law is made for the maintenance of lawyers. Justice is sold in England, and he with the longest purse wins; he can appeal from court to court, and ruin his adversary. You have nothing. What lawyer will look at you? Now—are you disposed for a compromise?'

'I will take a hundred pounds.'

'A hundred cocoa-nuts!' scoffed Mr. Cheek. 'Say five-and-twenty, and I will listen to you.'

'I have named the sum,' answered Joanna, and reseated herself, took up her sewing, and proceeded with it as if nothing had interrupted her. Mr. Cheek watched her thread a needle. Her hand did not shake.

'You will get nothing if you refuse my offer.'

She made no answer, but continued stitching.

'Charles is ashamed of himself already for having even spoken to you. What are you? A gutter girl.'

'Lower than that, sir,' exclaimed Joanna, without raising her head. 'The gutters empty into Sutton Pool, and I came out of the blackest mud in the bottom of the pool.'

'Charles has not a penny of his own.'

'He has less than a penny, sir. He is in debt.'

'Will you give him up?'

'You know my terms.'

He stood watching her, puzzled at and admiring her self-possession.

'Very well,' he said, thrusting a hundred-pound note across the counter with one hand, and a paper with the other.

'Sign this, and you shall have the money.'

She stood up, dipped the desk pen in ink, and appended her signature to the renunciation of her claims. Then she reseated herself, having taken the bank note, with an involuntary sigh, folded it, and put it in her bosom.

'So—you, who could not read nor write at Mr. Worthivale's, can read what is penned here, and sign your name to it in a bold hand—the same hand that wrote to me on the 11th instant.'

Joanna looked up at him in surprise.

'I know all about it. Mr. Worthivale is a sort of relation, and has told me. What took you to him with forged testimonials, eh? Both you and the lady who gave the character have become actionable. Aware of that, eh?'

Joanna made no reply.

'What took you there?'

'I was sent,' she answered.

'I said so—sent by Lazarus.'

She did not answer.

'Why did you examine the books and make extracts from them? Was that what Lazarus sent you there for, eh?'

She remained silent.

'Never mind. Always make a cat squeak by pinching its tail. Make you speak. Where is Lazarus?'

'He is not at home, sir. He will be here directly. Take a chair.'

Mr. Cheek did so. Just then, in came a woman with a Britannia metal teapot, milk jug, and sugar bowl, which she wanted to dispose of.

Mr. Cheek listened to the disputation over its value, to the remorseless way in which Joanna pointed out its defects, the way in which she flouted the poor woman when she named a reasonable sum as that which she demanded for them, the battle fought over a few pence when the shillings were settled, and the ignominious rout of the seller. As he listened Mr. Cheek's interest was quickened. He looked more attentively at the girl, and observed her keen face and brilliant eyes. 'She is no fool,' he said to himself. 'I wish I had her in my shop. She'd be worth pounds to me.'

Then in came Lazarus. Mr. Cheek gave him a nod. The Jew recognised him, uttered a crow of admiration, and rushed at him with both hands extended. Mr. Cheek at once put his hands under his coat-tails, and repelled Lazarus with a look.

'A word with you,' said he, 'in your den.'

Lazarus bowed and pointed the way. Cheek knew the passage and the room well enough, though many years had passed since he had seen them.

'Take a sedan, sir,' begged the Jew, bowing at every comma. 'You will find it easy, cuts off the draughts on all sides, sir. I will sit on my bed, my dear Mr. Cheek. Lord! what pleasure to see an old customer again! I hear affairs are flourishing with you, Mr. Cheek. I hear golden tidings of you, sir; and to think I had a hand in the making of you! Well, humble instruments, sir! very humble.'

'A hand in the undoing of my son, if in the making of me,' said Mr. Cheek, grimly. 'Which latter proposition I dispute.'

'No sudden embarrassment? Want a helping hand over a style?' inquired Lazarus, fawningly.

'No such luck for you?' answered Mr. Cheek.

'Then how may I meet your wishes?'

'I am about,' said Mr. Cheek, pompously, 'to make large investments in mortgages on the property of a great duke in these parts, his Grace of Kingsbridge. I understand that he is in immediate need of a considerable sum; and as I have my tens and hundreds of thousands at command, I am inclined to lend him what he wants on the security of some of his estates. Now'—suddenly—'what have you to do with the Duke's affairs? You sent that clever girl outside to Court Royal to pry into and find out how the Duke's books stood. What is your stake?'

Lazarus was so startled that he could not speak. He sat with open mouth and eyes, staring at his visitor.

'Know all about it,' said Mr. Cheek, coolly. 'Steward is my relation. He and your girl out there have told me all but one thing. What is your interest in the Kingsbridge estates?'

Lazarus pulled out his handkerchief and wiped his face.

'You—you are going to lend money to the Duke!' he exclaimed. 'I did not suppose you such a gull. Do you know that his land is mortgaged to its full value in times like these? It is a bad business. Do not soil your fingers with it.'

'Can take care of myself. Want no advice,' said Mr. Cheek, unmoved.

'You are bewildered and befooled by aristocratical hocus-pocus. I've seen the sort of thing done on a platform with a few passes, and a man loses his power of will. He does every-

thing the electro-biologist orders. The Duke has made his passes over you—be on your guard. The case is hopeless.'

'What have you to do with the matter?'

'I—I? Oh yes! I have lent money. I have taken up a mortgage or two. I've burnt my fingers. Perhaps you would like to see what the burdens on the estate are. You shall see.'

He went to his closet and extracted a memorandum-book, and offered it to his visitor.

'Is this what was extracted by your girl?' asked Cheek.

Lazarus winced.

'I see your name nowhere here,' said the great trader.

'No—no—but I am there. What do you think of that? Is it ugly or is it beautiful?'

'Very ugly indeed, for the Duke. Nevertheless, I don't see any great risk. I shall take over the two mortgages that have been called in.'

'Others are going to follow,' said the Jew. 'I have been to several of the mortgagees, who are my friends, belong to my race, and they are all stirring. Have you seen fowlers out wild-duck shooting when the winds drive the birds near shore? The men make a ring of boats and row inwards, driving the ducks and geese together till they start to fly, and then—bang! bang! bang! from all sides, and down they fall in hundreds. We'll bring down our ducal ducks. Will you join in the sport?'

Lazarus looked hard at his visitor, and Cheek measured him with his eyes.

'You are not moving out of love for the Duke?' said the Jew, derisively; 'not out of desire to uphold so grand a pillar of the Constitution?'

'The Duke and the ducal family are nothing to me. I want their land.'

'Their land and residence; Court Royal, with its park.'

Lazarus laughed maliciously.

Cheek looked hard at him. 'And you—you would do the same?'

'Of course. I want their land. I want to smoke them out, smoke 'em out like foxes.'

'Lion this,' said Cheek, 'smoked by fox. Joking apart, what is your game? You want the land. You have an eye on Bigbury Bay, to make of that a second Torquay. You want to work the slate quarries and the petroleum shale. Bah! you have not the capital.'

'Look here,' said Lazarus; 'let us go shares. Your kinsman Worthivale has been deluding you with assurances of solvency. The family never can pay its debts. I will foreclose on Court Royal. Do not help them against me. Others will follow. They are all ready. It is like an avalanche; pop! and it shoots down and buries all below. You lie by and buy the land as we or the Duke sell. Pick it up bit by bit.'

'I shall go to Kingsbridge, and see the place.'

'Go, by all means. Then you will be a judge if fortunes are to be made there. Bigbury Bay—that a second Torquay! You must find the site first, and the shelter. Why, the fishermen stand on the cliffs, and angle off them into deep water. Will you dig out a city in the rocks, like Petra? Slate at Kingsbridge! We have slate more accessible to Plymouth than that. Oil shale!—it has been tried. Plenty of shale, but no oil. Or do you want to oust the great family, and settle into its nest? Lend them money, and you will be done. The Marquess will marry an heiress, and wash his debts away. You will get your money back, but you won't get into Court Royal.'

'You are eager to keep me off,' said Mr. Cheek. 'What is your stake?'

'Fifty thousand, mine. I lead the way; I am Mr. Emmanuel, with my thumb on Court Royal and Kingsbridge. Others are coming on, till the family is crushed.'

'Fifty thousand!'

'Yes. Do not let us fight. Let us share the spoil together.'

Mr. Cheek made no reply. He was considering.

'You are going to Kingsbridge, eh?' said Lazarus. Be on your guard against the great people there. They do not regard you as belonging to the same order of creatures as themselves. They hold themselves a long way ahead of the like of us.'

'The like of us!' repeated Mr. Cheek, indignantly. 'Don't class yourself with me.'

'They make use of us, squeeze us as lemons, and throw the rind away. If they think they will get money or information out of you they will be gracious enough. Your cousin Worthivale will give them a hint to use you well. They will dazzle you with their magnificence, condescend to you most graciously, stupefy your mind with admiration of their polish and amiability and urbanity, then, when they have made what they wanted out of you, they will slam the door in your face and pass you unnoticed in the street. Be on your guard. I have forewarned you. If you want them to remain amiable and gracious, you must have their thumbs in a vice.'

CHAPTER XLIV.

A STARTLING PROPOSAL.

The serenity of security was gone from Court Royal. Though all went on there unaltered to the eye of the casual visitor, a change had passed over the house, like the touch of the first October frost on the park trees. And as the trees show their sensibility of coming winter in various tints, the maple turning crimson and the beech gold, the oak russet and the sycamore brown, so did the threat of impending ruin affect the various members of the household variously. Hitherto the house of Kingsbridge had been regarded as unbreakable as the Bank of England, as unassailable as the British Constitution. Now the faith had received a shock so rude that it could never recover its child-like simplicity. The windows of heaven were open, the fountains of the great deep were broken up, and in the deluge what would survive? The ark had sprung a leak, and all the household were aware of it and restless. On every face a shadow had fallen. The members of the family talked each other into momentary encouragement, and then parted to fall back into despondency. The Duke was the least affected. After he had recovered the agitation into which he had been thrown by the paragraph in the Society paper, he put the whole matter from him. He had known all his life that the estates were encumbered, he had known also all his life that this had not precluded him from spending money. Hitherto, when he needed it, money had been raised, it could be raised again. There was always water in the well. The pump worked badly. The fault lay in Worthivale; he was old, and creaky, and clumsy.

Lord Ronald, on the other hand, worried himself with schemes for raising money. He came into his nephew's room every day with a new suggestion as impracticable as the last, and when Saltcombe threw cold water over it he visited the Archdeacon, in hopes of gaining encouragement from him. At table, before company and the servants, the General was cheerful, told his old stories, abused the new army regulations, wondered what the service was coming to, when the first necessity for advancement was to gain the favour of the newspaper reporters. He was less sanguine in his views than heretofore,

that was the only evidence he gave in public that his mind was troubled.

Lord Edward remained at Court Royal, in spite of peremptory recalls from Lady Elizabeth, who insisted on his return to Sleepy Hollow, where cracks had appeared in the walls, and water was percolating through the roof, and the lamb-like curate was beginning to kick like a calf. Lord Edward saw that a crisis had arrived in the fate of the family, and he saw that his duty—the paramount duty—called him to remain at Court Royal. Where duties clashed the superior must be obeyed, and his duty to the family stood above all others.

The Marquess was altered since his return from Plymouth. The alteration was not in appearance only, it was also in manner. He had been hitherto agreeable in society, he was now silent. Nothing roused him out of his depression. Before he had been apathetic, now he was dispirited. He accepted the impending ruin as inevitable, and made no efforts to arrest it.

Beavis noticed the change and regretted it. The change was not for the better, but for the worse.

Only Lady Grace remained herself—cheerful, loving, trustful. She devoted herself more than ever to her brother, and, without appearing to observe his melancholy, combated it with all the weapons of her woman's wit. She forced him out of himself; she called her uncles and Lucy to her aid. Only when she was alone did the tears come into her eyes, and her brightness fade. Her brother was now her first concern, though she did not understand the occasion of his mood. She attributed it to despair of saving the family, consequent on the failure of his engagement to Dulcina Rigsby. Although she thought chiefly of him, she did not think exclusively of him. She did not even know the main cause of trouble. She had resolved that some of the property must be sold, and that the establishment must be reduced. She dared to broach the subject to her father, in hopes of persuading him to realise the gravity of the occasion, but he refused to listen to her. 'My dear Grace,' he said, 'talk of what you understand. If you want any more gardenias—and the new sorts are very fine—order them. Tell Messrs. Veitch to send you a *Lapageria alba*; we have only the *rosea* in the greenhouse. But, my dear, not another word about matters concerning which you know nothing.'

Somehow—it is impossible to say how—the knowledge that the existing order was menaced had reached the servants' hall, and the greatest consternation prevailed. Mr. Blomfield and

Mrs. Probus, the senior footmen, the coachman, and the lady's maid of Lady Grace put their heads together, and concluded that the true remedy lay in a reduction of the establishment. Lord Ronald must go. Lord Edward must not be there so much, and he must not bring that 'drefful Lady Elizabeth, as is so mean, and pokes her nose into everything.'

'Far be it from me to suggest,' said Mr. Blomfield, 'that Lady Grace is not heartily welcome to all we have, and to the best of everything; still, her ladyship can't be kept on nothing. She really ought to be married and go. The Marquess is different. We must put up with him; he is the heir, and will be Dook some day.'

'But if you send away Lady Grace, I must go too,' argued the lady's-maid.

'Under those circumstances,' said the butler, 'we will make an effort, and keep her.'

Upstairs, at the same time, Lady Grace was with Lucy going over the list of servants.

'Dear Lucy, it is very painful. I can't bear to send one away, they are all so nice, and good, and obliging. It is not that I care for myself, but that I fear they will never get another place where they will all be so happy and comfortable together.'

Owing to the tension of spirits at the Court, Beavis and Charles Cheek were there a great deal. Charles had been introduced as the cousin of Beavis and Lucy, and as his manners were gentlemanly, and his conversation pleasant, and his spirits unflagging, he was a welcome guest. Neither he nor Mr. Worthivale had thought it necessary to mention his relations to the monokeratic system, of which possibly the ducal family had never heard. Even if they had, Charles would have been received with perfect readiness as the kinsman of Lucy and her father. Lady Grace herself urged Beavis to bring his cousin whenever he could, to cheer the Marquess, and draw the minds of her uncles from the absorbing care.

Charles Cheek was very amusing; he was full of good stories, and had the tact to be agreeable without forcing himself into prominence. Indeed, he appeared at his best in this society. He knew what good manners were, and no one who saw him suspected the effort it was to him to maintain himself at ease among them. He was like a tight-rope dancer, who seems to be composed and assured on his cord aloft, but

who knows himself to be safest and happiest when he is on the solid ground.

He showed sufficient deference to the rank and age of his Grace, and the General and the Archdeacon, to conciliate their favour. With the Marquess he was freer, though always respectful, and Lord Saltcombe said once or twice to Beavis that he liked his cousin, and hoped to see a good deal of him. He invited him to come in the shooting season, and placed his horses at his disposal for hunting. He was asked to take frequent strolls with Lady Grace, and Lucy and the Marquess, when Lord Saltcombe naturally fell to Lucy, and Charles to be companion to Lady Grace. These walks were delightful to Lucy, as her sparkling eyes and glowing cheeks testified. Lady Grace enjoyed them, for Charles was always amusing, sometimes interesting. He was a man with a good deal of shrewd observation of men and manners, which he used to good effect in conversation. Lady Grace had a sweet voice, thoroughly schooled, and as Charles sang well, with a mellow tenor, and knew his notes fairly, they practised duets together partly to please themselves, chiefly to give pleasure to the Duke.

The young man was sensible of the charms of Lady Grace; he had never before been in the society of a perfect English lady, and a perfect English lady is the noblest and most admirable of the products of centuries of refinement. The culture of the English lady is a culture of the entire woman, mind and soul, as well as of body, perfect refinement and exquisite delicacy in manner, in movement, in intonation, in thought, and in expression. No man can escape the attractions of such a woman; it seizes him, it raises him, it humbles him. It raises him by inspiring him with the desire to be worthy to associate with such nobility; it humbles him by making him conscious of his own shortcomings.

Charles Cheek had been so little in the society of ladies of any sort, and was so ignorant of the ladies of the best English society, that this association with Lady Grace exercised over him quite irresistible fascination. He was uneasy when a day passed without his seeing her, and when out of her presence the recollection of her words, and the pleasant way in which she spoke them, formed his great delight. It can hardly be said that he loved her, it was certain that he worshipped her.

'Grace dear,' said Lucy one day to her friend, 'take care what you are about.'

'What do you mean, Lucy?'

'You are throwing your imperceptible threads round that simple young man, and binding him in bonds he will be powerless to rive away.'

'What young man?'

'My cousin Charles.'

'Nonsense, Lucy!' said Lady Grace, colouring slightly and looking vexed.

'You cannot help yourself. You bewitch every one, down to old Jonathan the gardener, and Tom the stable boy. You cannot help it. You have thrown your glamour over my cousin. I can see it. When he leaves this place he will feel like the Swiss exiled from the Alpine air and roses to be pastrycook in Amsterdam. You remember that queer girl we had at the Lodge, and who ran away. You did the same with her, and she sent you a necklace in token of undying devotion. Now you are playing tricks with Charles. Take care that you do not encourage him to do something equally absurd. As for my father and Beavis, you know very well they would let themselves be cut to pieces in your service.'

On the twenty-second of the month, Mr. Cheek senior arrived, and was invited to dine at the Court, along with his son and the Worthivales. The old trader was highly gratified. He was struck with the grand staircase, the well-lighted magnificent rooms, rich with gilding, pictures, and silk curtains, with the livery servants, and the general ease and luxury. He was courteously received, somewhat ceremoniously, and he had a few words with the Duke, who made himself agreeable, as he could when he chose, by touching on a subject likely to delight the old man.

'What a very nice fellow your son is, Mr. Cheek! He has enlivened our rather dull society of late. I do not know what we should have done without him. Beavis is our usual *pièce de résistance*, but Beavis has been out of sorts lately. We feel under a debt to you for having spared him so long.'

Mr. Cheek held up his head. 'Your Grace is too complimentary.'

'Not at all. I always speak my mind.'

The General came up. 'I am glad to make your acquaintance, sir,' said Lord Ronald; 'though I owe you a grudge, and I do not know that I shall ever be Christian enough to forgive you. Your boy ought to have been in the army.'

'My fault, my lord. Bitterly regret it now—when too late. A mistake.'

'It was a mistake. He is a daring fellow. He was hunting the other day, and took the hedges splendidly. No end of pluck in him. Sad pity he is not in the army.'

The delighted father watched his son all the evening. He did not talk much himself, and Lord Edward and the General found him difficult to get on with. The reason was that his attention was taken up in contemplating his son with admiration and wonder. He could not have been more astonished had he assisted at a miracle. Charles was at ease in this society. Charles could talk, and make the great people listen to him. After dinner Charles played and sang a solo, talked to Lucy Worthivale, and sent her into a fit of laughter, stood in the window in familiar discussion with the Marquess, then went to the Duke, conversed with him, then at his request sang a duet with Lady Grace. After that Charles was on an ottoman with the lady, talking to her in an animated way, expressing himself with his hands like a Frenchman, whilst her colour came and she smiled. She coloured because she remembered the words of Lucy.

Mr. Cheek was struck with her; her delicate beauty and purity impressed him. He was not afraid of her, but he had not the courage to get up from his place and walk across the room to speak to her. Presently she came over to him, and talked, and the old man felt as though a light shone round him, and a sense of reverence and holy love came upon him. He did not remember afterwards what she said, or what he answered, but thought that he had been in a dream. Afterwards, when she was at the piano again, he watched her, and shook his head, and smiled. Then he looked at Charles turning the pages of her music for her, and he said to himself, 'Charles is a genius! It is not in me. The Duke and that old soldier chap didn't pile it on too much. He is all they said, and more. Worthivale was right. This is the element in which he must swim.'

Mr. Cheek and the steward walked home together, Charles and Beavis went on before.

'Are they not charming people? Is not the house quite perfect?' asked Mr. Worthivale.

'This the style of daily life?' asked Mr. Cheek.

'Always the same—of course.'

'And the income, the debts, the mortgages, the outs always

the same?' said Mr. Cheek. 'Nothing for it but a smash-up. Seen the accounts. Balance bad. I—even I—with the Monokeros on my back, couldn't afford it.'

'You have never seen this sort of life before,' said the steward, reproachfully, 'and so—it rather surprises you. Splendid, is it not? and so homely and genial too.'

'Won't go on,' said the man of business. 'Can't do it on the balance. Col-lapse.'

'I hope not—I trust not.'

'I can help them. I can save them.'

'I knew it, I was sure of it,' exclaimed the delighted steward.

'I see they like Charlie, and Charlie likes to be on this shelf. I don't. I ain't suited to it. Set me on end on the floor. Don't roll me up and chuck me aloft on a top shelf. Charlie can take that place, and he shall. I like to see him there.'

'He conducts himself very well, but what has he to do with the present emergency?'

'Everything. Charlie shall make Lady Grace his missus. Then he'll belong to the aristocracy, whatever I may be.'

'What!' Mr. Worthivale sprang back, and his hat fell off.

'Charlie shall make his proposals to Lady Grace, and I'll find two hundred thousand pounds to clear off such of the mortgages as are now troublesome. The Monokeros is still alive, and bringing in money for Charlie and his deary. If this ain't a handsome offer, show me one that is. If you don't like my shop, go to another.'

'Are you mad? You must be mad!' exclaimed the steward, too amazed to be indignant. '*Your* SON and SHE! What are you thinking of?'

'What am I thinking of? Mutual accommodation. As you said to me, I want blood and they want money. Is it a deal?'

Mr. Worthivale stared at his guest, and remained rooted to the spot.

'Madman!' he gasped. 'Is nothing sacred with you?'

'As you like,' said the trader, indifferently. 'Take my offer or reject it. I can do without better than you.'

'Not a word of this raving nonsense to a soul,' said Mr. Worthivale, grasping his arm. 'Lord! I wouldn't have any one hear of this for all I am worth.'

'As you like,' said Mr. Cheek, putting his hands in his pockets. 'Those are my terms.'

CHAPTER XLV.

RETRIBUTION.

Next morning Mr. Cheek was silent at breakfast. Charles was not in his usual lively mood. His father had told him in his room, the night before, of his plan, on their return from the Court. He had told him also that Mr. Worthivale had refused to entertain it. Charles was startled and gratified at the prospect; startled, because he had not dared to wish it, startled also, because he was not sure that he did wish it; gratified, because he saw open to him the means of taking a place in society that had been hitherto inaccessible. He was silent because, thoughtless though he was, the conjuncture of affairs was one that forced him to think.

Worthivale was nervous and agitated at breakfast. Drops stood on his brow, and he was unable to pour out the coffee, his hand shook so, and he was forced to pass over the duty to Beavis. Something had occurred, more than the proposal of old Cheek, to unnerve him.

After breakfast Mr. Cheek drew the steward aside. 'Well, now,' he said, 'with morning come cool counsels. Shall we deal?'

'How can you speak in such terms?' asked the steward. 'Do you not perceive that it is impossible for the daughter of such an illustrious house to accept—— Stuff! as well propose an alliance between an eagle and a crocodile! Preposterous! simply preposterous!'

Mr. Cheek stretched his arms, then drew his finger over his lips. 'There is nothing preposterous in it,' he said. 'Worse matches have been made. One likes apples, t'other likes onions. To my mind, I am the more respectable party of the two. I have lifted myself out of nothing, by my industry, into affluence. They have degraded themselves, by wastefulness, out of wealth into bankruptcy.'

'Will you not help the family, without conditions?

'Do you take me for a fool? What are they to me?

'Surely—surely, to obtain their esteem, to deserve the regard of the Duke, the respect of Lord Edward and Lord Ronald, the gratitude of the Marquess—that is something.'

'Not worth a farthing to me,' answered Mr. Cheek, roughly. 'Put it up to auction; who will bid?'

'Besides, you would not be giving your money, only investing it most safely.'

'I have made my proposals,' said the elder Cheek. 'To them I stick as cobbler's wax.'

'I cannot listen to you!' exclaimed the steward. 'You might as well sue for the moon.' He paced the room, swinging his arms; he was hot with indignation.

'I do not want the moon. I want that young woman'—Worthivale shivered—'for my son. She'll make a tidy daughter-in-law. As for those old codgers'—Worthivale's blood curdled (their lordships—*codgers*!)—'they are like turkey-cocks in a barn-yard, ruffling feathers and gobbling at the little fowl. *She's* other. Wouldn't give herself high and mighty airs.'

'For Heaven's sake!' cried the steward, putting his hands to his ears, 'have done, or I will leave the room.'

'Needn't go,' said Mr. Cheek. 'I'm off, next coach. Time valuable. Can't afford to waste it like a parcel of gorgeous good-for-noughts.'

'Going!' exclaimed the steward, aghast, and standing still. 'You are not going to-day. To-day is the twenty-third: I invited you to be here when we meet Crudge, the solicitor for Mr. Emmanuel.'

'Can't waste *my* time. Sheer waste. Made my proposal—refused. Enough; I go.'

'But the investment is so good.'

'Know of a score better.'

'But—but you led me to expect——'

'Nothing. Never committed myself. Too old a bird for that. Said I would come and look about me. Have done so, taken stock, and made a bid.'

'Which I refuse.'

'It has not been submitted to the proper parties.'

'If by proper parties you mean the Duke and Lady Grace, I absolutely refuse to mention it to them. They—I mean the Duke—would kick me out of the house. She—Lady Grace—I would not dare to look her in the face again.'

'As you like,' said Mr. Cheek, washing his hands in the air. 'Don't take amiss. When dry will brush off. I leave by next coach. One thing, however, I do ask. Allow Charles to remain. Don't want him to be back in Plymouth yet. Understand?'

'Let him stay here, by all means.'

'Right. Hope you'll enjoy yourself with the mortgagees. Cheerful company. Pleasant ways, eh? If in distress, and you change your mind, wire. Let the young female give her word of honour that she will take my Charlie, and I am ready with my two hundred thousand. She's not one to go from her word. Now—portmantle.'

'Was there ever such a fool—such a confounded fool!' cried Mr. Worthivale, when Cheek had left the room, as he ran about, holding his head. 'That I should have lived to hear him talk!'

Half an hour later, the great Cheek of the Monokeros was gone, and the hope that had hung on him had fallen and lay broken with many another shattered hope.

'Well!' said the General, entering the dining-room about the hour when the meeting was to take place, 'what says your kinsman to the mortgages? Will he take them?'

'He is a fool, an abject, drivelling fool!' answered the steward. Lord Ronald sighed. He had buoyed himself on the expectation which Worthivale had confided to him, that relief was certain from this quarter.

'That is not the worst,' said Worthivale, in a low tone, and he trembled and became white and moist.

'What now?'

'By this post,' gasped the steward, 'the—the Insurance Company have given notice——'

'My God! not the Loddiswell mortgage for four hundred thousand?'

Worthivale put his hand to his mouth to cover a groan.

Then they heard a carriage drive up to the garden gate, followed by a ring at the bell. A moment after, the maid announced, 'Mr. Crudge, solicitor,' and the lawyer entered, followed by Lazarus, dressed respectably.

'Good afternoon, my lord. Good afternoon, Mr. Worthivale,' said Crudge, with freshness and confidence. Allow me to introduce Mr. Emmanuel.' He presented Lazarus; the General bowed stiffly, Worthivale shook hands. They seated themselves, Lazarus with his back to the light, in the window, behind Mr. Crudge. Presently the Marquess arrived, with Lord Edward. They bowed to Crudge and Lazarus, and took chairs by the fire, offered them by the steward. With them entered Beavis.

Conversation began on the weather. Crudge talked of the

crops—as is correct, to those living in the country—and on land. Lazarus said nothing. So passed ten minutes.

'Let us proceed to business,' said the soliciter, looking at his watch. 'By the way, I bear a note for you, sir, from Messrs. Levi and Moses, who hold the seventeen thousand pound mortgage on Alvington ; and also the second, on the same estate, for twenty thousand. I am instructed to act for them. Both must be met in three months from date.'

A silence ensued, broken only by a little, quickly subdued chuckle in the window.

Then Beavis opened proceedings, by stating that the sudden calling up of mortgages at a time when rents had had to be reduced twenty to twenty-five per cent. all round, and when some rents were in arrear for two and three years, at a time, moreover, when land was at an unprecedentedly low value, was very inconvenient to the Duke, and that he desired the mortgagees to reconsider their demand, and allow time for the recovery of the farmers, when, in the event of his not being able to transfer the mortgages, or himself find the amount, land would have to be sold.

The solicitor replied that he was acting both for Mr. Emmanuel and for Messrs. Levi and Moses, and he could say that his clients were not disposed to be harsh, but to accord every reasonable indulgence. They, however, did not participate in the sanguine view entertained by his Grace. They believed that rents would fall still lower, that the golden day of British agriculture was set, and the whole industry menaced with extinction. Holding this, they were anxious with promptitude to release their money, that they might invest it elsewhere.

'But, if you proceed to extremities, you will be selling land when it hardly reaches twenty-five years' purchase.'

'Better that than sell when it will not fetch twenty years' purchase. I have heard of desirable properties in North Devon in the market, and not a bid made for them at fifteen.'

'But this is in South Devon.'

Mr. Crudge shrugged his shoulders.

'What, then, do you propose, or demand?' asked the General.

'We are ready to meet your convenience as far as possible. I am instructed to yield so far as this—half the total at the expiration of three months from date of notice, the rest in two equal portions, at intervals of three months.'

Again a sound like a chuckle from the window. The Marquess looked sharply round, but Lazarus, who sat there, was quiet, his face in shadow and illegible.

'Small charities!' said the General. 'Better the sword Miséricorde which ends the torture with a thrust.'

Silence ensued. Lord Edward and the General looked down; the eyes of the Marquess were on the fire.'

Lazarus watched them eagerly with malicious delight.

'You will go no further?' asked Mr. Worthivale.

'This is the limit imposed on me by my clients. You will understand, I am but the intermediary; I am obliged to act as directed.'

Worthivale bowed.

Ten minutes of painful silence ensued.

'I see no necessity for prolonging the meeting,' said the Marquess, rising.

'None at all, as far as I am concerned,' answered the solicitor.

'Sorry the matter should be ventilated with such freedom in the papers. There was something about it a little while ago, and now the Society papers are still more explicit. There is no mistaking the allusions. If worth while, prosecutions might be begun. Hah!' said Crudge, 'I have them in my pocket. Really, these periodicals are offensive and insulting.'

The colour rushed into the General's face. Lord Edward turned pale, and held the jamb of the chimney-piece to prevent himself from falling; a mist formed before his eyes. Lord Saltcombe compressed his lips and clenched his hands. As Crudge offered him the papers with coarse civility, he brushed them aside.

'You want me no further?' he said to Mr. Worthivale.

'No, my lord, there is nothing to be done.'

'Very well; I will consult my uncles at home. I wish you all a good afternoon.'

'A *very* pleasant afternoon to you, my lord,' said Lazarus, also rising, and bowing deeply.

Lord Saltcombe slightly bent his head, and left the room.

Almost immediately after, Lazarus followed; Crudge was detained but a few minutes. When he also was gone, Lord Ronald looked at his brother.

'Hopelessly ruined—that is the plain English,' he said.

'And satyrs dance and scoff over our grave,' said Lord Edward, pointing to the papers.

The Marquess was walking slowly through the park to Court Royal, when he heard rapid steps behind him. He did not turn to see who followed; then he heard a voice.

'Heigh! Lord Saltcombe! Most noble Marquess, a word with you.'

He arrested his walk, and waited patiently till he was caught up, but without turning his head.

A moment after he saw at his side the man Emmanuel, whom he had scarce noticed at the meeting. The man was panting. He had run to catch him up. Lord Saltcombe waited till he had gained breath to speak. He did not know Lazarus. If he had seen him in past years, it had been but briefly and rarely, and he did not recall his features; besides, Lazarus was oldened and altered since then.

'You do not know me, most noble sir?' said the Jew, in a tone between deference and defiance.

Lord Saltcombe contented himself with a slight shake of the head.

'I suppose not. Oh, no! of course not! You do not know who Emmanuel is, who holds his grip on your heart? No, I suppose not!'

Lord Saltcombe became impatient; he turned to continue his walk, without speaking.

'Do you know who holds two of your mortgages, and who has worked and stirred up the other mortgagees against you? Who has your own—your own bills in his hands?'

Lazarus walked beside the Marquess, peering into his face with an expression full of vindictiveness. Lord Saltcombe looked in front of him; he made no reply, but the veins in his temples swelled and darkened.

'You do not know, I presume, that I, I hold you all in my power—that you are at my mercy? Do you know who I am?' asked Lazarus starting forward and standing in his way.

'I know that you are an obstruction, and unless you move yourself at once I shall lay my stick across you.'

'Oh, my Lord Cock-of-the-Walk!' exclaimed the Jew. 'What airs we give ourselves!'

Lord Saltcombe's eyes lightened. He raised his walking stick, and would have brought it down on Lazarus had not the Jew hastily added: 'I am Emmanuel Lazarus, of the Barbican, Plymouth!'

Then the stick fell from Lord Saltcombe's hand. He stood still, and looked keenly at the man before him. The pawn-

broker had stooped; his attitude was cringing as he shrank from the menaced blow. His eyes glittered with hate.

Lord Saltcombe drew down his hat and folded his arms. 'Well,' he said in a low tone, 'say what you will, I cannot touch you.'

'Ah!' exclaimed Lazarus, 'you may well stand still and look down when you encounter me—me, the man whose home you broke up, whose honour you stained, whose happiness you blighted. What was I? Only a Jew usurer. What were you? A great noble. Now I am in the ascendant, and you grovel. Now it is my turn to cast you down, and put my foot on your proud neck. I will hold you there, writhe as you may to be free. It was I who spoiled your fine matrimonial schemes with the coffee-planter's daughter. It was I who warned off old Cheek from coming to your assistance. It was I who put your affairs into the Society papers, and made you the talk of the town. It was I who stirred up the other mortgagees to foreclose. I have waited long till I could find a way to hurt you. Did I say just now you were at my mercy? It was a wrong word. I have no mercy in my heart for such as you, only retribution.'

Then Lord Saltcombe looked him full in the face. He was deadly pale, but he did not move a muscle, nor did his lips quiver. He spoke with perfect calmness, the calmness of perfect self-control.

'Mr. Lazarus,' he said, 'I would have sought you out years ago, had I thought the interview would lead to good. But though I did not seek you, I have always desired to meet you, that I might express to you my sorrow, my deepest sorrow for the wrong I did you. Perhaps it was weakness and want of resolution which hindered my going direct to you. Providence has now brought us face to face, and I hasten to express my contrition. You can say to me nothing that I have not said, and said daily, almost hourly, to myself. You speak of retribution. She—she—' his voice vibrated for a moment. 'She has been overtaken by the hand of God, and has suffered where she sinned. I do not hope, I do not wish to escape the chastisement of heaven. Why should I go free, when she has endured the penalty? If it has pleased the Almighty to touch me in the place where most sensitive, in my pride and love for my family—His will be done. My only regret is that I must draw down with me other, and those very dear heads.' He was silent for a moment, with his eyes

on the ground. For a moment he needed silence, to recover that command over himself which he felt was slipping from him. Lazarus said nothing. His face was perplexed with contending emotions—hate, surprise, disappointment.

'Mr. Lazarus, take up that stick. It is a sword-cane. I pierced your heart once with the deadliest of thrusts. I will stand here, or anywhere you like, and give you full and free leave to run me through the heart with that needle blade. No one will suspect you. No one will suppose but that I fell by my own hand, unable to endure the humiliation of witnessing the ruin of my house.'

The Jew stooped, picked up the sword-cane, and drew the weapon. It was fine, keen, and sharply pointed. He looked furtively at Lord Saltcombe, who unfolded his arms, and stood before him motionless, beside a tree.

The Jew's fingers tingled as he held the sword. He turned it, and it flickered in the evening light. In the button-hole by the heart of the Marquess was a red rose. The Jew's blood bounded at the thought that with a thrust he could bring forth something redder there than that rose. But he re-sheathed the blade and shook his head.

'That,' said he, 'would be insufficient. It would be too quickly over. Take back your sword-cane. I have not done with you yet.'

'You have refused me a favour, 'for which I would have thanked you,' said the Marquess, coldly.

'Because I knew it would be a favour,' answered Lazarus venomously, 'therefore I refused it.'

CHAPTER XLVI.

E TENEBRIS LUX.

In the evening the General came into Lord Saltcombe's room. The old man was looking haggard. His grey moustache was not smooth, as usual, but looked like ragged lichen. The spring and strength seemed taken out of him. Lord Saltcombe was pacing the room with arms folded. Lord Ronald put his hand through his nephew's arm and paced the floor with him, without speaking. After several minutes' silence, the General said, 'Your uncle Edward leaves to-morrow. It is of no use

his remaining. Even he can do nothing now. If it had been possible, he would have managed it. We have been deceiving ourselves. Disenchantment has come. Herbert, we have been a happy and an united family. We will stand to our arms, and go down in the old ship together, as men The Duke must know all, and resolve to sell the greater part of the estates. Court Royal itself, if need be.'

'Yes,' answered the Marquess, 'I have foreseen this. As you had hopes, I did not press my view. Now you have come round to my opinion. Loddiswell and Alvington must go. Fowelscombe also. Probably Court Royal. We shall never now be able to maintain the place. Better crawl into a smaller house and there die.'

'Perhaps Court Royal might be kept during the Duke's life.'

'No,' answered Lord Saltcombe. 'Let us see the worst over. If we live on here we shall be always tempted to keep up the old state.'

'But remember what Worthivale has said about the Bigbury property. It is worth comparatively little now, but if a company were formed, and a town begun there, it might rival Torquay, and be a golden-egg-laying goose to us, and then the family would flourish again.'

'There is no time for forming a company and building a town. If this had been tried three or four years ago we might have been saved; but now it is over. If a fortune is to be found there, it will not be by us.'

'You are right,' sighed the General.

'Beavis,' said the Marquess, 'calculated on saving a portion of our lands. Let us keep Bigbury—it is possible that some day it may "render," as the French say; but more than half our property must go.'

'And dear old Court Royal,' said the General, with a quivering voice.

'Yes, Court Royal must go, or it will drain away what remains in the vain attempt to live up to it. If we do not, what wretchedness to be among abandoned conservatories, neglected grounds, ruinous outhouses, empty stables!'

'Poor Grace!' sighed Lord Ronald.

'Grace has more courage than you, uncle, soldier though you are. Grace will leave her flowers without a sigh, and the pretty rooms that have been her nest without a tear. You will see nothing but smiles on her face, and hear only words of cheer from her lips.'

'Yes—I suppose so,' said Lord Ronald. 'And yet—she will feel the loss more than any of us.'

'She will have Lucy.'

'Of course, Lucy will never leave her, good, faithful girl.'

'Uncle Ronald, you may as well know everything. My notes of hand have all been called up. You know how extravagant I was some years ago, when in the army. Well, the sum, compared with the mortgages, is nothing, but for all that, in our present distress, whence is the money to come?'

'Pitiful powers,' cried the General, 'troubles are raining on us as fire and brimstone out of heaven, and what have we done to deserve it?' He stood still, put his hand to his forehead, and thrust his fingers through his white hair. 'My head spins. I cannot think.'

'The first thing to be done,' said Lord Saltcombe, 'is for us to collect our plate and finest pictures, and send them to Christie's, and have them sold.'

The General withdrew his hand from his face, and stood staring blankly at his nephew. Then two clear drops ran down his furrowed cheeks. He hastily took out his handkerchief and blew his nose, to disguise what he was ashamed to have seen.

'Yes, uncle—this must be.'

'The Duke will never consent.'

'Then it must be done without his consent.'

'Herbert! not possible.'

The Marquess said no more; he caught his uncle by the arm, and made him continue with him the mechanical walk. He did it to enable the old man to overcome or disguise his emotion.

'I never was sanguine,' said Lord Saltcombe. 'I have felt that a storm was gathering over our heads, and that no conductors would divert the flashes into innocuous channels. You and the Archdeacon were more hopeful, so was Worthivale, who, of all others, had best reason to know how matters stood. But when Beavis spoke out so plainly, and Uncle Edward and you refused to accept his opinion, then I knew that the end was near at hand. For myself, I care nothing. Life has little of interest, and is void of ambitions for me. But if it were possible to do anything to soften the blow to Grace and my father, I would do it. There is, however, nothing—only the sad duty of preparing them for the worst, and that I take upon myself. With Grace it will be easy. With the Duke

hard, and I may have to call on you to assist me. The mortgagees have a power of sale, and they will exercise it. What will remain to us out of the wreck, I suppose not even Beavis can tell.'

Late in the evening, Worthivale arrived. He was in such a condition of confused misery, that he could not collect his thoughts sufficiently to advise what should be done. He produced his books, but in his bewildered state of mind could make nothing out of them.

'The disgrace!' moaned the General. 'The humiliation to our proud name.'

'You are a soldier,' said Lord Saltcombe.

'There are some things past the endurance even of a soldier,' answered Lord Ronald.

'Where is the Archdeacon?' asked the steward. 'His opinion would be invaluable now.'

'He has gone to bed,' answered the General. 'He is not feeling well. He is much dispirited by the events of to-day. To-morrow he must return to Sleepy Hollow.'

Then the steward and Lord Ronald began to spin cobwebs —cobwebs that needed but the breath of common-sense to blow them away.

Lord Norwich was the brother of the late Duchess. He was getting old and infirm, and he had not been down to visit the Duke lately in Devon. Lord Ronald thought of him. He was wealthy. Why should not he come to the rescue? The Marquess and Grace were his sister's children. Lord Saltcombe reminded them that his son, the Hon. Norfolk Broad, was not likely to consent; he had spent a great deal on the turf, and would probably run through the property when his father died.

Then Worthivale suggested the taking in hand of the oil-shale works. Oil had not been extracted from them before in sufficient quantities to be remunerative, because the wrong sort of crushers had been employed. The Marquess replied that if the crushers squeezed out gold, then it would be worth while getting them, not otherwise.

'Perhaps the Archdeacon will think of something; he is an eminently practical man,' said the General. 'I dare say he has gone to bed early to consider the matter between the sheets, and he will be ripe with a proposal to-morrow.'

Thus sat the three the greater part of the night; the Marquess was the only one who kept his head clear. At three

o'clock the steward and Lord Ronald left, and then he flung himself on the sofa, and fell asleep.

That same evening Lady Grace had been in conference with Lucy in her own bedroom, as she prepared to go to rest. She was in a pretty blue dressing-gown, her hair falling about her shoulders loosely. The lady's maid had been dismissed, and Lucy and she were alone together.

'Tell me truly, Lucy. The meeting has led to no good results?'

'No, dear. I hear that half the amount of two of the mortgages must be paid forthwith, and the rest in two instalments within a twelvemonth. But that is not all. Two more mortgages held by Jews are called in, and so—— Worst of all is the terrible one on Loddiswell.'

'And the money is nowhere forthcoming?'

Lucy shook her head.

'Then what will be done?'

'A great deal of the property will be sold.'

'And Court Royal—must that go?'

'Beavis thinks so. Land sells very badly now.'

'I shall not have to part with you, Lucy?'

'No'—and Lucy nestled into her friend's side—'never, never. Oh, my darling!'

'For myself I do not care. If I cannot have my greenhouses and gardens, no one can deprive me of the green lanes and flowery coombs. I can be happy anywhere with you and papa, and Uncle Ronald and my brother. But I do not know how the others will bear it. Dear papa—I fear it will kill him. Uncle Ronald and Saltcombe are looking miserable. Did you observe Uncle Edward last night? I never saw his face so drawn and colourless. He was very bent and feeble. I asked him what ailed him. He smiled sadly and said, "Only a general break-up." He takes this to heart, and he is not a strong man like the General. I suppose the dreadful truth must be told papa shortly. I must manage to be present so as to soothe him. He will be fearfully excited. If I can but hold his hands I may be of some good in keeping him cool. What is to be done about Mrs. Probus? Dear, good creature, she is bound up with us and cannot live away from us; and I do not think papa would be happy if he thought she were not in the house; she understands his little fancies. Then old Mr. Rowley, the coachman, with his red face. Oh, Lucy! he has been so comfortable here with us, just driving papa out

every afternoon. What will become of him? He is too aged to take another situation, and I hear that gentlemen are putting down their carriages everywhere. Then there is Mr. MacCabe, the head-gardener. He has been so civil. I have been afraid of him sometimes. I feared he would scold when I swept the houses of flowers But he only smiled, though the loss of the cherished blossoms went to his heart, I know. And Jonathan —he has always shown himself so eager to oblige. Lucy! what trouble he took over that rockwork for my Alpine garden, and in piling it up he crushed one of his fingers and lost the nail. And Jane, my maid! I give her so much trouble; I am untidy with my things. There, there—I must cry—but it is not for myself; it is only because we shall have to part with all these nice, kind servants, and because papa will be miserable anywhere else, and Uncle Ronald without plenty of room for his lathe, and Saltcombe without his yacht, and his fishing and shooting. He cares for nothing else, and these will be taken from him. He will have Beavis.'

'Beavis, you may be sure, will cling to him to the last.'

'Yes,' said Lady Grace, and she patted her friend's hand, which she held between her own, and looked thoughtfully before her, 'and your father will always be with mine! Oh, what a blessing it is to have dear, faithful friends. Let everything else go. These precious, golden hearts are above all that the world can give.' After a silence she said reverently, 'And they are God's gift, to comfort us.' Both were affected, and said nothing for several minutes, but Lucy stooped and kissed Lady Grace's hand.

'Lucy,' said the latter after awhile, 'I thought you told me that Mr. Cheek was going to help us.'

'We thought he would, but when it came to the point he drew back, and made ridiculous conditions.'

'Surely he had all but promised, had he not?'

'I cannot say that. My dear father was very sanguine when he returned from town. He told us that he had managed everything beautifully, and that we had no more occasion for anxiety, as our relative, who was a millionaire, would come to the rescue. Dear papa's ducks are all swans, and he is hopeful on the smallest grounds. When Mr. Cheek came here, he did not even go over the estates, he simply came and went again. He did not even attend the meeting.'

'But you say he made some sort of offer.'

Lucy coloured.

'I ought not to have said that. Papa mentioned it to me as a secret. He had not told Beavis, as it would have made Beavis furious—and he might not have been civil to Charles any more.'

'Of course if you are bound not to tell, I will not press you. Otherwise, I would be glad to know the conditions.'

'They were too outrageous to be mentioned,' said Lucy, partly laughing, partly crying. 'It makes me very angry, and yet disposed to laugh, whenever they recur to me.'

'You very angry! you, Lucy! that would be a new experience to me to see my little friend in a passion; and Beavis furious—who looks so gentle and collected.'

'Enough to make us. If you heard, you would be angry also.'

'Tell me, and prove me.'

'I am ashamed. Promise me not to say a word to Lord Saltcombe, or Lord Ronald, or the Duke—not to anyone.'

'No—I will not repeat what you tell me.'

'Then you shall hear. That stupid old man, Mr. Cheek, saw how agreeable his son made himself at dinner, and being a blunderhead, he supposed that there was more in his attentions to you than ordinary civility. Well! the dull fellow went home, and told papa he would give two hundred thousand towards clearing the mortgages the day he heard that Charles was accepted by you. Did you ever dream of such audacity? My father had to exercise great self-restraint to keep from knocking the man down. Some minds are not properly balanced.'

The blood rushed through Lady Grace's veins, crimsoning her pure face and neck and bosom. Next moment she was as white as a snowdrop.

'I must not keep you up any later, Lucy,' she said. 'It is time for both of us to go to bed.'

Lucy looked at her friend with surprise. Not an allusion to what had been said passed her lips. Lucy noticed her paleness, and misinterpreted it. 'I have offended you, by telling you of this piece of vulgar presumption. Let the remembrance of it die. I am sorry that I allowed myself to blab the impertinent secret.'

'Not at all,' answered Lady Grace. 'I thank you for telling me. Kiss me, and go to bed. I want to be alone.'

Next morning early, Lady Grace entered her brother's room. He was still asleep on the sofa. The shutters were

shut, and the curtains drawn. The servants had looked in, but had not liked to disturb him.

His sister partially opened one of the shutters, so that a ray of light entered. Then she drew a chair beside the sofa, and sat down by her brother's head.

Presently he woke. Her gentle, pitiful, loving eyes, resting on his worn face, had disturbed him. He looked round and sat up.

'Grace!' he said, and brushed his hands over his brow to collect his senses.

'Yes, dear, I am here.'

'I thought I was visited by an angel.'

She was in a light print morning gown, her face was pale, and in the dimness of the room might well have been thus mistaken.

'Uncle Ronald, Worthivale, and I have been keeping up quite a revel,' he said.

She looked round; there were no glasses on the table, but plenty of papers scribbled over with calculations.

'This looks sadly dissipated,' he said; 'I am sorry you see me and my room in such a condition, Grace.'

'Oh, Herbert! do not think to deceive me. I know well what it means. All hope gone. Everything lost. Is it not so?'

He did not answer.

'Yes, brother, I know the worst, and I am glad that I do. I have not slept at all. I was sure you and the dear uncles were restless through trouble. I have come to you thus early to set your mind at ease. The house need not be sold, the servants need not receive notice. All is not lost. E tenebris lux.'

'I see no light.'

'It is coming.'

'Who will bring it?'

'I daresay I shall.'

'You, dear sister?' said Lord Saltcombe with a laugh. 'Do you remember the little snipe that supposed it could stay up the heavens with its feet, when the thunder rolled, and it thought they were falling? It said, "I, even I, will uphold the skies."'

CHAPTER XLVII.

LEIGH.

The Archdeacon left without giving advice. He had no advice that he could give. He looked ill. When Micah had his idols stolen by thievish men of Dan, he beat his breast, and tore his beard, and cried, 'Ye have taken away my gods which I made, and what have I more?' The belief in his family stability had been the deepest fibre in his soul, and now that conviction was torn up, his mind was in collapse. He had regarded himself as able to assist in every emergency, if not with money, yet with counsel, and now he found himself powerless to avert the impending ruin either with money or with counsel.

The General wrote letters all day, which he tore up and rewrote. He looked greyer and older than before, and was silent at meals. Lord Saltcombe placed no reliance on his sister's promise of relief. Whence could it come? He knew of no quarter. She had given him no reason for encouragement. He attributed her hopes to a natural disposition to look for the best. He deferred breaking the news to the Duke, from his habitual procrastination, of putting off doing what was unpleasant.

Charles Cheek was still at the Lodge. He could not disobey his father, who had insisted on his remaining there, but he was getting mortally weary of the life. Lady Grace exercised over him the same spell, but the country life, the want of daily variety, the lack of genial companions of his own age, made him wish himself back in Plymouth. He had no resources in himself, and a man without such resources is only happy in a crowd.

'Beavis, old boy,' he said one day, 'I shall give a dinner at the "Duke's Head," and break this frightful monotony. Young Sheepwash and I play at billiards when we do not hunt, and there are one or two other fellows at the club, who are not bad, but stupefied by living out of the world. I feel like a comet getting further and further into outer space. This Kingsbridge is one of life's backwaters where only sticks assemble. I shall give a dinner. I'll ask the Vicar's son. He is a good fellow enough. His father wants him to go into the Church, because the Duke can dispose of some livings, but he wants to go on

the stage, which is absurd ; he has no looks and no memory. Can I invite Saltcombe ?'

'You can call him, but will he come ? I think not ; he is much engaged over unpleasant business, which has put him out of tune.'

'Out of tune ! I should think so ; there is no tune in him at all.'

'You must excuse him. He has heavy anxieties.'

'I know that—about money. That is no excuse for moping. I am always in trouble about money, but it never spoils my pitch. Beavis ! you have not heard of my last escapade, and how I got out of it. I lost a hundred pounds on a snail to Captain Finch. I hadn't a hundred pence in my pocket, and he was under orders for India. A girl got me out of my hobble. Little monkey ! It fills me with laughter whenever I think of her. Beavis ! His Grace the Duke of Kingsbridge could not do better than cross the palm of that little witch with silver. She'll help him, if help be possible.'

'How did you—or she manage it ?'

'She is a queer piece of goods, very respectable. Not a word against her character. I have had many a joke with her now and then. Well !—will you believe me ?—she appealed to my father, and threatened breach of promise.'

'Had you given her occasion ? Did you like her ?'

'Like her ! Couldn't help liking her. Such a rogue ! Enough to make one laugh all day. You never knew where to have her. Well, my father was in a tearing rage, and went down to Plymouth to see her, and bought her off with a hundred pounds.'

'What has that to do with your debt ?'

'Everything. She enclosed the note by next post, with my compliments to Captain Finch, who was surprised and delighted to get the money so expeditiously.'

'She kept none of the money ?'

'Not a farthing.'

'Is she well off ?'

'Has not a sixpence.'

'Why did she do this ?'

'To help me. Because I christened my snail after her. I wish I could go to Plymouth, and see her again to thank her. It seems shabby not to do so, don't it ?'

'Your father was quite right in insisting that you should stay here.'

'I cannnot stand it much longer, Beavis. The country was not created for me. Glad I wasn't born in prehistoric periods before towns were. Your father is most kind and good to receive me, and the people at the Court are very hospitable, but I get tired of the same faces, same scenes, same subjects of conversation, day after day. I do not know how I should live without the club and the billiard-table.'

'You enjoy your walks with the ladies.'

'I get a certain distance with Lady Grace, but no further.'

'Pray how much further do you want to go? Pretty well for you to be received into such a house with courtesy.'

'Oh, don't you know? My father and I have settled that she is to become Mrs. Charles—I mean, Lady Grace Cheek.'

'What an honour!' exclaimed Beavis, sarcastically. 'Pray are the Duke and the lady informed of your intentions?'

'No, I have not had sufficient encouragement.'

'Then let me advise you to refrain from communicating the flattering proposal to either, till you *have* received the requisite encouragement.'

'Of course, of course,' said the unabashed Charles. 'My governor is set on it. I should like it well enough. When I am with her, I am over head and ears; when I am away, I am not so sure that she will suit me.'

'Have done!' exclaimed Beavis. 'This is intolerable.'

'Did you ever hear the story of the North Country collier and his son, who were breeding a dog for fighting? The son went under the table and barked, and the dog flew at him and bit his nose, and held on as a stoat to a rabbit. The lad screamed to his father to call off the dog; but the old fellow said, "Let him bite, lad, let him bite, it'll be the making o' the pup." I think my governor is urging me on in this affair for the same reason. "It'll be the making of the pup," he says.'

Beavis's face flushed. He turned his back and walked away. Charles Cheek ran after him. 'There, old fellow, don't take amiss what I have said; it is only a joke.'

'Then joke on some other subject. Lady Grace Eveleigh is sacred.'

'By all means,' said young Cheek, 'we'll change the topic. Are you going to the Plymouth ball?'

'No, I think not.'

'Nor Lord Saltcombe, nor her ladyship?'

'They never attend.'

'Well!—I am off to the Court. We have planned a walk

to-day to Leigh Priory, which they say is pretty; and we shall pick primroses and wood anemones on the way. Will you come?'

'No, I have business.'

'Then there will be only three of us—tricolor. Lady Grace, Cousin Lucy, and myself. Saltcombe has something to detain him.'

Beavis nodded. He was ruffled by what Charles had said, and the swell in his temper would not allay itself at once. Charles walked through the park and joined the ladies.

Leigh is an old priory converted into a farmhouse; it is almost as left by the monks when expelled three hundred years ago, with scarce an alteration save the destruction of the church. It stands in a wooded valley, with rich green meadows occupying the bottom. A sweet, sheltered nook, basking in the sun—a place in which to dream life away.

The walk was pleasant, the air soft, the sun bright, the buds of the honeysuckle had burst into leaf, an occasional white butterfly flickered in the way. The woods were speckled with starry wind-flowers, and the edges full of yellow primroses. Here and there the blue periwinkle was spread as a mat. It had escaped originally from the priory garden, as had the snowdrops, and had become wild, like the virtues—simple virtues—of the old monks, which lingered on in the congenial soil of the simple rustic souls of that part of Devon.

'I wonder whether there is truth in Sir Henry Spelman's doctrine that Church property carries with it a curse that consumes the lay impropriators,' said Lady Grace, partly to Lucy, partly to herself. 'Leigh has belonged to the Eveleighs since the dissolution.'

'No, Lady Grace,' answered Charles; 'the cause of decay is generally to be found nearer at hand than in a theft of three centuries.'

'Yes,' she answered, with a sad smile, 'no doubt you are right. We throw back the blame on our remote forefathers, that we may shut our eyes to our own faults. We Eveleighs have but our own improvidence to look to as the cause of our fall. We have not taken warning in time. We let occasion slip, till occasion came no more.'

'There is no immediate anxiety, I hope,' said the young man.

'Yes, before the year is out, our doom will be sealed, our ruin published to the whole world.'

Lucy looked at her friend with surprise. Hitherto she had not spoken on this subject to a stranger, and now she was courting conversation thereon.

'Let us hope for the best,' said Charles.

'It is of no avail hoping. We have cast out the anchor, and there is no bottom in which it will bite. A fig tree in our garden has been failing for some years. Last autumn I pointed it out to old Jonathan. "Please, my lady," he said, "the fig is going home." This spring the wood is dead, and Jonathan is stubbing up the roots. "He's gone home, as I said," was his remark. Well! the old tree of Eveleigh is also going home, and next year we shall be stubbed up out of Court Royal, and gone home altogether.'

Young Cheek did not relish a dismal subject. He tried to brighten the conversation by changing the topic.

'Do you ever go to the Plymouth balls? They are select and good.'

'I have not been for some years. At one time, but not since Saltcombe has not cared to attend.'

'Won't you come to the next, at Easter?'

Lady Grace paused, looked down, and said, 'If you wish it.'

Lucy started, glanced at her timidly, and coloured. Even Charles was surprised. He said quickly, 'Wish it! It will crown the ball with perfection. Oh! Lady Grace, how delightful! Then Lucy also will come, and, no doubt, Lord Saltcombe also. That will be charming indeed! How pleased the Plymouth people will be!'

Charles Cheek found a bank of blue borage and pink crane's-bill, and some golden celandine—the two former had lingered through the mild winter, untouched by frost. He made two little bouquets, and presented one to each of the ladies. On their way home the conversation reverted to the family troubles. Lucy was puzzled. She did not say much; she left the other two to talk. Her mind was engaged wondering at her friend's manner, which seemed changed.

'I wish—oh! how I wish,' said Lady Grace, 'that there were some means by which our ruin might be averted. I would do much—I would do anything that lay in my own power—to save my dear father the sorrow, and to give my brother a chance of beginning life again, uncrushed by the consciousness of the impending Götterdämmerung. The knowledge of what was coming has blighted his life, once so bright with promise.'

Charles looked intently in her face.

'Do you really mean this, Lady Grace?'

'What I say, I mean,' she answered, with a slight tremor in her voice.

Lucy, frightened, looked at her, and saw two fiery spots in her cheeks.

'I have no pride. If it lay with me, I would sacrifice myself, were my sacrifice worth anything to anyone.'

'Lady Grace!'

No more was said. They were in the park. They saw Lord Ronald walking towards them, without his hat, his white hair raised by the wind. He was looking excited.

'I want you, Grace. There is a telegram—from Edward. No, I do not mean that—about your Uncle Edward. A telegram from Glastonbury, from Elizabeth; come in. Saltcombe and I must be off immediately. The carriage is being got ready without delay. We must catch the 7.40 up train. That, however, sticks at Exeter, and we shall have to waste over an hour of precious time on the platform. It cannot be helped, though the Duke urges our telegraphing for a special.'

'What is it?—Oh, uncle!' exclaimed Lady Grace, with fluttering heart, 'tell me the worst—is he—— ?'

'No, not that,' answered Lord Ronald hastily, but he turned his head aside and wiped his eyes; 'whilst there is life there is hope. A seizure. How severe, the telegram, that is, Elizabeth, does not say. Saltcombe and I are requested to hurry to Sleepy Hollow. The wording is short. Elizabeth might have been fuller. We have not told the Duke all; only that we are wanted, and that—that Edward is unwell. That has made him uneasy. You must go to him, and pacify him, and in an hour or so show him the telegram. I am afraid, Grace, that this is a serious case. How blows do fall one after another! and Edward the one man of the family on whom one leaned! My God! if we lose him, what shall—what shall we do?'

As Charles parted with them at the door, Lady Grace said to him, in a sad, plaintive voice, 'I am sorry I cannot keep my promise. You see the reason. I cannot attend the ball.'

That evening, in her room, Lucy said to her, 'Oh, Grace! what am I to understand? You gave Mr. Cheek such encouragement! After that—he will be daring to ask for your hand.'

'If he does I will give it him.'

CHAPTER XLVIII.

THE FALL OF A PILLAR.

Lord Ronald and the Marquess reached Bridgewater at midnight. There they engaged a fly, and drove across country to Sleepy Hollow. The drive was long. There was no train so late from Highbridge to Glastonbury, consequently they had no choice. When they drew up at the rectory door the hour was early in the morning, and the first streaks of dawn appeared. A light was in an upper window.

Lady Elizabeth appeared. She had expected them, and sat up; she was calm and collected. Lord Edward was no more. He had not recovered from his stroke. The archdeaconry of Wellington, a canonry in Glastonbury, and the rectory of Sleepy Hollow, were open for eager applicants.

A bright fire was burning in the study, and the table was laid near it. The cook was up, and a smell of mutton-chops pervaded the house.

'Will you have some hot wine and water, or stout?' asked Lady Elizabeth. 'Dear old man. He seemed to know me. I held his hand, and he pressed it when I spoke to him. There is Worcester sauce, if you like it. He seemed very unlike himself when he returned from Court Royal. I am afraid he over-exerted his brain. I know you all thought him very clever. I always considered him very *good*. There is cold rabbit pie, if you prefer it; but I have no doubt you are chilly, and would like what is hot. At this hour there is no choice—chops and mashed potatoes, or cold meat. There was a worry, moreover, about repairs. Nothing has been done to the house for some time—in fact, we have not had the money to execute necessary repairs. Now we shall have a terrible bill for dilapidations. Edward got a builder to go over the roof with him, because the rain came in. I think he caught a chill, and being below par he succumbed. He was a very good man, and so dear to me!' Lady Elizabeth began to cry. 'I know the chops are tender,' she said, after having wiped her eyes. 'One of our own sheep—we killed on Monday. I do not know why it is that when we buy mutton we give tenpence to tenpence-halfpenny, and when we sell we get only sixpence. We could not eat all the sheep ourselves, so what we did not want

was sold to our workmen and parishioners. Edward let them have it at sixpence. He was so kind—so over-kind. He was easily imposed upon. He did not sufficiently consider himself.' Presently, after another suffusion of tears, 'You must eat. There is ground rice in a shape, and strawberry jam. I know you are unhappy. You loved Edward. So did I; but we are human, and must care for our bodies. Eat, eat, Ronald. Finish that bottle; you shall have another uncorked in a minute. That insufferable curate of ours has mounted the blue ribbon. The last word I heard him murmur was "Ichabod;" that means "The glory is departed." I am alluding to Edward, not the curate. I thought he wanted to leave me a message. His lips moved, though his eyes were closed, so I leaned over him and said, "Yes, Edward, dear, what is it?" Then he sighed heavily, and pressed my hand, and opened his eyes, and said, "Ichabod!" I believe after that he had not a conscious moment. Never mind, Ronald, the gravy has not gone through.' This referred to a spill of the juice from the chops on the tablecloth. The General's hand had trembled as he helped himself to the gravy. 'I think you had better not see him to-night. He looks so sweet and peaceful, as if he were twenty years younger. Dear, dear fellow! What shall I do without him? You had better lie down; do go to bed for a few hours. You shall not be disturbed; you have had a long and harassing journey, and you, Ronald, at your time of life, cannot bear these strains like the young. Now, of course, nothing can be done. If he had lived till your arrival it would have been different. Your beds are aired, have no fear; and there are fires in your rooms.'

Lord Ronald and the Marquess remained till after the funeral. The funeral was conducted with some state; Lord Edward was an Archdeacon, Canon of the Cathedral of Glastonbury, and last, but not least, son of a Duke. All the principal clergy and gentry of the neighbourhood attended, and the parishioners showed and wept, the women especially. Would the next rector let them have his mutton at sixpence?

The Hon. Cadogan Square, brother of Lady Elizabeth, was there. The Squares were a great legal family, the head of which had been created a peer.

When the Archdeacon's will was read, it was found that he left all his personalty to his wife, five hundred pounds to the Cathedral of Glastonbury, five hundred to the widows and

orphans of the diocese, four hundred to the County Hospital, one hundred to the S.P.G., and one hundred to the C.M.S. All the rest of his property was to go to his niece Grace. But when his affairs were looked into, it was further discovered that his real property had been got rid of, sunk in the great Kingsbridge vortex in loan upon loan. Further, it was discovered that dilapidations on the rectory, and the chancel, and some cottages on the glebe, would amount to a thousand pounds, which the widow would be called upon by that horse-leech Queen Anne to pay.

It was further discovered that Lord Edward was several hundred pounds in arrear to the Glastonbury Bank. Also, that the butcher's bill (mutton never below tenpence) for the last eighteen months was unpaid, and amounted to one hundred and forty pounds four shillings and five pence three farthings. The grocer's bill for the last two years had been a running account, with running discharges of a few pounds at random ; the wine merchant's had not been attempted to be paid except by fresh orders. Lord Ronald was executor. It cost him fifty pounds to prove a will which left nothing to anybody but debts. The Madras Railway bonds had been sold a week before the death of the Archdeacon, and what had become of the money nobody knew. No money was found in the house, except thirteen shillings and sixpence, the proceeds of the sale of part of the sheep to parishioners, at sixpence per pound.

Lord Ronald was obliged to write to the Duke to entreat him to send him some money to cover immediate expenses. This the Duke was fortunately able to do out of the proceeds of the Madras Railway bonds, which had gone to him, and he had given the Archdeacon a note of hand for the amount, which somehow could not be found.

Most fortunately the club accounts, and the church accounts, were in perfect order, as were those of the diocesan societies of which the Archdeacon was treasurer. This was only so because these were managed by Lady Elizabeth, who kept all the money received in green baize bags, properly labelled, in a locked cupboard, suspended to pegs, like Bluebeard's wives. The curate, however, had not received his salary for the last half-year. The servants had all been paid recently. Lady Elizabeth discharged their wages out of her private purse. Unfortunately for the curate, she did not pay his. As soon as he was able to get away, Lord Ronald returned to Court Royal. He had been very warmly attached to his brother

Edward, whom he had reverenced as a pillar of orthodoxy—a pillar he was, like that of Pompey, supporting Nothing—and an ultimate appeal in all matters of difficulty relating to the farms. Lord Ronald was a man with a very gentle, tender heart, and Edward had been associated with his happy boyish days. They had been at school together ; they had been companions in the holidays together. In after life, Ronald had always made of his brother Edward his closest friend and confidant, and adviser. Consequently the death of the Archdeacon shook the old man profoundly. The troubles and difficulties involved in his executorship bewildered and depressed him.

The Duke was shocked to see how altered he was when he returned to Court Royal. He lost his memory now and then, and seemed dazed, and had to hold his hand to his head to recollect himself. His face was more lined, his hair whiter, it looked thinner ; he was less carefully dressed, and his hands shook. His back was bent, and his tread had lost its firmness.

The Duke clasped his brother's hand. 'You have felt the loss of Edward severely, Ronald. So have I. Dear, good, loving soul, full of honour and charity ! And what a brain ! clear, sound, well balanced. He ought to have been a bishop. Well ! the world of this nineteenth century was not worthy of him. There is one great and good man the less, the like of whom will not be met with again.'

After a pause he continued : 'I do not know what we are coming to. The spirit of the age has affected our excellent Worthivale. He demurred to my putting all the servants in mourning. He said the expense would be so great, as all the men must have new black liveries, and the women each a pair of black gowns and a bonnet apiece. I overrode his objections. I have no patience with this peddling spirit of retrenchment, whether in the affairs of the nation or of this house. It would be a scandal not to go into mourning for Lord Edward. The expense is unavoidable. I presume he has left a handsome sum behind him. I think you told me in your letter that he had left everything, except a few trifles in charity, to Grace. As for Elizabeth, she is provided for by her marriage settlement.'

'I am afraid Grace's chance of getting anything is very small,' said the General ; 'and we shall be hard put to, to find money for the charities. I don't quite know what is to be done about the debts—is Elizabeth to pay them ? They are

heavy. As for the charities, they amount to sixteen hundred pounds, and this we must find; if we do not find it voluntarily, the Dean and Chapter, and the officers of the Widows and Orphans, and Propagation of Heathens, and Church Missionary can force us. It would be a scandal——'

'My dear Ronald, everything shall be paid at once. I shall see Worthivale to-day.'

'Let Saltcombe and me settle that,' said the General. Do not concern yourself further in this matter. I do not know whether Saltcombe has spoken to you about the mortgages on Court Royal and Kingsbridge. They have to be met very speedily. Indeed, time is flying, and the money must be raised. I have been thinking—what do you say, Duke, to the sale of Kingsbridge House? It is of no manner of use to you now?'

'Good Heavens!' The Duke rose in his chair. 'Do I hear you aright? The sale of Kingsbridge House? Your wits are leaving you, Ronald. How can we sell that? We must have a town house. Why, Saltcombe will be marrying—he may be Duke shortly, and then he must spend the season in London. No, not another word of that. The Duke without a town residence! like a foreign yellow-backed book, published without a cover!'

'We cannot make bricks without straw,' murmured the General.

'How, bricks without straw?' asked the Duke, testily.

'We are in a condition in which we do not know where to look for money, and yet we have to pay Edward's bequests, some at least of his debts, and the mortgages on the very heart of the property.

'Worthivale will manage it.'

'Worthivale cannot work miracles. The Alvington mortgages are also called in, and the Loddiswell threatened.'

'Send Saltcombe to me. We will arrange for a fresh mortgage, or get these transferred. They have been transferred already—at least some of them.'

'But more money must be found, and a transfer is not easy in these unsettled times. The property is burdened beyond what it can bear in prosperous times.'

The Duke bit his lips and frowned. 'We have managed very well hitherto, and we shall manage in the future.'

'We have managed in the way of the ostrich—the family crest, and not an inappropriate one—by putting our heads into

a bush, and thinking, because we see no danger, that none menaces.'

'Really, Ronald, your anxiety as executor to Edward's will has ruffled your temper.'

'Not a bit. Something must be done, and I do not know what to do, now Edward is gone. I expected Saltcombe to have told you all—he undertook to do so. As he has failed, I must. Emmanuel's mortgages must be paid at once—those of Moses and Levi within three months—bills have been called in, which we must meet. Here are our debts to Edward, which must be cancelled within a twelvemonth, and the charitable societies satisfied. It will never do for them to say that the poor and the heathen have been cheated of a few pounds by the noble house of Kingsbridge. Then there is the Loddiswell mortgage—and others that are sure to come.'

'These things right themselves,' said the Duke. '"Tout vient à celui qui sait attendre." Let Saltcombe take those troubles off your mind.'

'Saltcombe is prepared to sell.'

'To that I will never consent.'

'If you will not sell voluntarily, the mortgagees will sell from under your feet.'

'Nonsense. Worthivale will satisfy them all without their coming to extremities; besides, if it did come to that—well—rather be robbed than voluntarily alienate the patrimony of our ancestors.'

'Look here, Duke. Let us sell those Rubens at Kingsbridge House. Some of them are scarcely decent—fat nude females and satyrs tumbling amid goats, and peaches, and grapes, and cherubs, and red and blue drapery, which is everywhere except where it ought to be. One of them, you know, is covered with a curtain. Of what good to us are these pictures? Let them be sold. They are worth a great deal of money, and we should be thankful to be rid of such voluptuous nightmares.'

'They were presented to the Field-Marshal by the grateful City of Antwerp. They are heirlooms. They have a history. They have been engraved. We cannot part with them.'

'There is a quantity of old plate here—I should say tons of it, which is never used. Why should not that be sold?'

'For the best possible reason, that each piece has a history. Some were presented for services rendered, others are works of high art, some came to us through distinguished marriages. No, the plate cannot be parted with.'

'Then the books. There are perches of volumes in the library no one ever looks into, some, doubtless, valuable; possibly some unique. Let us have down a London bookseller to value them, and if need be, purchase them. Which of us cares for old books now?'

'They are all bound and impressed with our arms on the covers, or have our bookplates inside. I cannot endure the thought of them finding their way into the libraries of common Dicks and Harries. No—the books must not be sold.'

'There is the family jewelry. There are magnificent sets of diamonds and other stones, never worn. Let them be disposed of.'

'Not on any account. Saltcombe may marry, and his wife will need our jewelry. You would not have a Duchess of Kingsbridge without her diamonds?'

'I give it up,' said the General, distractedly, with his hand to his head.

'My dear Ronald,' said the Duke, 'if we are to go down, which I will not for one moment admit, let us sink like Rienzi and his sister in the last scene of the opera, amid falling pillars of Church and State, of the moral and social order. I see on all sides threatenings of the dissolution of the bases of society. It may be that we, in England, will go through throes like those of the Revolution in France. It looks like it. All that we honour and hold sacred is menaced. There is no security anywhere. In the general social upheaval and constitutional overthrow, we may be crushed, but do not let us contribute to our own fall.'

'I want to avert it,' exclaimed the General.

'Listen to me. I must trouble you not to interrupt me. There is one thing of which, if we be true to ourselves, we can never be despoiled—our dignity. Let us maintain that. Let us combat the powers of evil—I mean the democracy——'

'But this is not a case of democracy at all, but of debt,' interrupted the General.

'You are again snapping the thread of my argument,' said the Duke, offended; 'and now I don't know where I was, it has shrunk out of reach like a ruptured tendon. Do not let us cast away what is ours, as sops to Cerberus, to facilitate an Avernan descent.'

'What about the charitable bequests? The honour of the family is at stake.'

'Where the honour of the family is menaced, it must be

maintained at all cost. "L'honneur avant la vie." But I can see no dignity in the lizard, which when pursued slips joint after joint of his tail, and is content if he lives, a maimed and despicable trunk.'

Lord Ronald was trifling with a bronze lizard paper-weight on the table as the Duke spoke, and his Grace's eyes were on it. 'There is something to me unspeakably contemptible in attempting to conciliate the masses by dropping privilege after privilege, and selling estate after estate to satisfy Jewish money-lenders—it is all the same.' He paused, still looking at the lizard. 'I do not see how it is possible that Edward can have left so little. He had a good income from several quarters, and Elizabeth was not penniless.'

'He has left nothing but debts.'

'What sort of debts?'

'Butcher's bill, grocer, shoemaker, clerical tailor, fruiterer —I cannot tell you all. There is quite a commotion among the shopkeepers of Glastonbury; they think they will be done out of their money.'

The Duke reddened. 'Done out of their money! Nonsense, Ronald! With me to fall back on? Write to them at once. I make myself solely responsible for all my brother's debts. Every man shall be paid, and paid promptly.'

Lord Ronald still stood playing with the bronze lizard.

'Well!' said the Duke, looking up, 'that settles everything, I trust.'

'But whence is the money to come?'

'My dear fellow, I cannot attend to such trifles. Worthivale will manage that. Let him have the figures.'

'And the charities?'

'All shall be paid—to the fraction of a penny.'

'But how?'

'That is not your affair. It can be done, of course. I pledge myself to pay.'

The General sighed. 'Oh, Edward! Edward!' he moaned, as he walked away more dispirited than when he entered the room. 'Only your genius could now disperse the cloud of difficulties! And you are gone. One pillar is fallen, and the whole building will go to pieces.'

CHAPTER XLIX.

AN APRIL FOOL.

A GREAT change had come over Lazarus. Whether it dated from the sprouting of the moustache, or from the conference at Court Royal, and the final imposition of terms on the great family, could not be determined by Joanna with nicety. She thought that the change began with the moustache and ripened after the latter event. Lazarus was elate. Old Cheek had retired without interference, and now that his heart was lifted up, he was more liberal than when he consented to an occasional bloater. Indeed this liberal tendency had swelled into large proportions. He had not shrunk from saddle of mutton with onion sauce, nor from fillet of veal with stuffing, nor from sirloin of beef and Yorkshire pudding—only at pork he had drawn a line, for he was strict in his Hebraic prejudices.

'Have pig's puddings if you like, Joanna. Don't let my inclinations bar your way—yet, perhaps, such is the delicacy of your feelings, you don't like to eat and see me fast.' He spoke thickly, making strange efforts with his mouth to get out the words.

'What is the matter with you, Mr. Lazarus? Your speech is queer, and your appearance changed——' Joanna stopped short, and stared. Lazarus opened his mouth. He had provided himself with a double set of artificial teeth.

'I thought I'd electrify you,' he said. 'Yes—I've had my jaw taken in hand by an artist—a dentist. Cost me a lot of money, Joanna, the charge was outrageous—a fancy price as for an object of vertu. But, so long as it pleases you, I don't care.'

'I wish,' said Joanna, 'that you'd be more particular about your hair, Mr. Lazarus. You make your pillow as black as if you used your head for a flue brush.'

Lazarus looked down.

'You used to have grey hair.'

'Not grey,' said the Jew; 'just a speckle here and there—like wood anemones in a grove.'

'But now your hair is glossy black. Don't use your head again on the chimney. If you object to a sweep I will use a holly bush.'

'It is not that,' he said, humbly.

'Then what is it?'

'Dye,' he replied, with deepened colour,—a coppery blush. 'Dye that cost me five shillings. I've gone through a course of Zylobalsamum and Eau des Fées. There, Joanna, if I blacken my pillowcase I am sorry. Henceforth I'll tie a black silk handkerchief round my head when I retire to bed.'

'What was that concern I found on the chair in your room, this morning?'

'My stays,' whispered the Jew.

'Stays!' echoed Joanna.

'Call it corset,' said Lazarus. 'It sounds more aristocratic. My figure wants it.'

'What next?' asked Joanna contemptuously. 'Are you coming out in knickerbockers and a Norfolk blouse?'

'I don't like irony,' said the Jew; 'it hurts my feelings, which are ticklish as the soles of my feet. Joanna! what say you to a picnic? A jaunt to Prince's Town, on the moors in this brilliant spring weather, and a look at the convicts—so as to combine moral edification with pleasure?'

'I should like it.'

'You shall have it. Express a wish, and I fly to fulfil it. I have even forestalled your wishes. I've invited the old lady from the ham and sausage shop to join us as a sort of chaperon, you understand.'

'When is this to be?'

'On Sunday, when no business is doing. A carriage and pair, in style. It will cost a lot, too, but what of that, if it give Joanna pleasure, and the mountain air bring roses to her cheeks, and the sight of the prisoners inspire her heart with virtue.'

'Why have you invited Mrs. Thresher?'

'As a chaperon. But,' with a chuckle, 'if it would suit you better, Joanna, to come alone with me, I'm—as I always am and must be—agreeable. The weight will be less for the horses. The ham and sausage woman weighs ten stone before her dinner. Not that we shall be charged less for going without her—but we shall have to feed her out of our pockets. There is that to be considered. If I order a dinner at six shillings, and there are only ourselves to eat it, we shall consume three-shillings' worth each, whereas if Mrs. Thresher comes we shall be limited to two. That has to be considered. However, it is for you to decide. I'll regulate my appetite by your decision.'

As Joanna said nothing, he added, 'There is another point worth weighing. If the ham and sausage lady comes, I must sit with my back to the horses; that makes me bilious, and spoils my relish of the victuals. Where you pay you expect to relish. It wouldn't be etiquette to set a lady rearwards to the horses, would it? But no—I'll manage. We'll have a wagonette!'

'There's one thing I should like above every other,' said Joanna; 'that is, to go to the ball.'

'The ball! But I can't be there.'

'That will not affect my pleasure. You have spoiled my fun more than once. I was to have gone to a grand dance at Court Royal, but could not, because of your affairs. Now the spring ball is about to come off, and I should dearly love to be there.'

Lazarus rubbed his head, and looked at the palm of his hand, upon which the dye had come off.

'Joanna,' he said, 'you don't consider. These balls are very select; only ladies of the county families, and the wives and daughters of officers. No second-rate parties there——'

'I don't want to go to any second-rate affair. The best, or none at all.'

'But I don't see my way to manage it. You'd want a chaperon, and the old lady from the ham and sausage shop is not quite, as the French put it, cream of the cream.'

'I remember that you once told Mr. Charles Cheek that you could send me to any ball you had a mind to, and no lady dare refuse you.'

'I was romancing,' said the Jew: 'I'm by nature an Oriental, and prone to soar into poetry.'

'I will go,' said Joanna decisively.

'I can't find the way to do it,' answered Lazarus.

'Very well; go to the moors with Mrs. Thresher, eat your three-shillingsworth. I will remain behind.'

'Oh, no, no, Joanna! I've set my heart on this excursion.'

'And I have set mine on the ball.'

'I'll see about it,' muttered the Jew.

'I shall not give a thought to the moors. You need have no dread of sitting with your back to the horses. You can lounge in the back seat with Mrs. Thresher.'

'Joanna! I would not go without you. My body would be on Dartmoor, but my soul would remain at the Barbican. If you could see inside my heart,' he said in a pathetic tone,

'you'd behold your own self curled up there—like a maggot in a hazel-nut. But there, I'm launching into poetry again.'

Joanna vouchsafed no remark. He sat and watched her, but she showed no symptoms of relenting.

'I'm not now what I once was,' he went on. 'Then I had an object before me for which I toiled and stinted. Now that object is attained, and I need stint and toil no more. Hitherto life has been to both of us a time of privation, now it shall become a holiday. I will deny you nothing on which your heart is set. I have money in abundance, and as you have helped me to make it, you must help me to spend it. If you want rings, take them from my drawer. Chains and bracelets are at your disposal. Select what gowns you like, they are all yours.'

'Go to bed,' said Joanna; 'the whisky has got into your old head.'

After that she would not speak to him. He made many attempts to draw her into conversation, but all failed. When he was about to retire to rest, he stood in the doorway, the picture of distress, and sighed, and said in a soft tone, 'Good-night, Joanna.'

She poked the kitchen fire savagely, and said nothing.

'Won't you say "good-night" to me who've been so kind to you?'

Still no answer.

'I'll think about the ball, Joanna.'

Still obdurate.

'You—you shall go to the ball, Joanna.'

'Good-night, Mr. Lazarus.'

The change in the Jew's manner caused the girl uneasiness. She was shrewd enough to see what it meant. He had fallen in love with her after a peculiar fashion. For a long time he had used her as a drudge, as a mere slave, without compunction what he laid upon her and how hard he treated her. By degrees he came to realise the value of her services, and he began to ask himself what would become of him were they withdrawn. Where could he find a substitute? She had grown into his ways, to understand his requirements, almost to think his thoughts. She had been educated in the business and comprehended it thoroughly in all its parts and turns. Then, when he had come to appreciate her worth to him, Charles Cheek appeared on the stage, admiring her, hanging about the house, and threatening, as the Jew feared, to carry

her off. Alarmed at the prospect of losing her, his eyes opened to the fact that she was grown to be a woman, and a beautiful woman. He grew jealous of the visits of young Cheek, and jealousy, bred in self-interest, awoke a sort of monkey-love in the old man. His wife was dead and he was free.

Joanna did not, perhaps, read all that passed in his mind, but she read enough to be uncomfortable in his presence, and to repel his advances with decision.

She used his infatuation as far as served her purposes, but she kept him well at bay. Several times when they were together, she noticed that he was working himself up to a declaration of his sentiments. The sure sign of this was his helping himself repeatedly to the spirit-bottle. When he did this the girl left the kitchen, and did not return till his courage had evaporated.

Formerly the Jew had drunk nothing but water, only occasionally mixed with whisky. Of late he had enlarged his doses, not of water, but of whisky. He sometimes pressed her to take hot spirits and water, to sip some from his glass, on the pretext that she had taken a chill, but she steadily, even rudely, refused.

Lazarus was disagreeable enough in his earlier bearish mood, he was worse in his later loving mood ; and, in spite of the increased comfort in the house, Joanna would gladly have returned to the former state of affairs, to be freed from his ungainly and irksome amiabilities.

Joanna was not happy. She had not seen Charles Cheek for some time, nor heard more of him than a report brought by Lazarus, that he had been to his father and that the old man had forbidden his return to Plymouth, the scene of so many follies.

The day fixed for the excursion to Prince's Town broke brilliantly.

Dartmoor is a high barren region, rising from two to three thousand feet above the sea, towering into granite peaks, broken by brawling torrents. In the heart of this desolate region, and in the most desolate portion, in a boggy basin devoid of picturesqueness, stands the convict prison of Prince's Town, above the line where corn will ripen and deciduous trees will grow ; often enveloped in vapour, exposed to every raging blast from the ocean.

To pass from the warm, steamy atmosphere of Plymouth to the cold and bracing air of Prince's Town, is almost a leap

from the hot into the frozen zone. The drive was delightful. Joanna and Mrs. Thresher sat facing the horses, and the latter talked of the drop in the price of pork and the quality of imported bacon, during the greater part of the journey. The Jew occupied the position that disagreed with him. Joanna entreated him to change seats with her, but his gallantry was proof against her solicitations. He cast yellow, malevolent glances at Mrs. Thresher, who made no such offer, which, had it been made, he would have accepted. He maintained his place, sitting sideways, and his face became momentarily more sallow. He wore a straw nautical hat, with a blue riband about it with fluttering ends, and in golden characters on the front, an anchor and the name 'Nausicaa.' His black vest was very open, exhibiting a starched white front set with coral studs, and a black tie à la Byron slipped through a cornelian ring. Over his waistcoat dangled a massive golden chain, and his fingers were covered with rings.

As the unfortunate man became really unwell, the ladies insisted on his mounting the box. 'But then,' said he gallantly, 'I am turning my back on the finest view,' and he bowed to Joanna and raised his cap, exposing a very discoloured lining.

Joanna enjoyed the drive, especially that part of it when Lazarus was not opposite her, getting yellow in face and grey in lip.

She did not talk to Mrs. Thresher ; she was not interested in American bacon ; she was engaged in looking about her, at the views, the hedges, the rocks, the rushing stream that danced and feathered over the granite boulders. The hedges were starred with primroses. Here and there they were white, and here and there pink. The larks were singing and twinkling high aloft, the busy rooks were cawing and flashing in the sunlight, looking sometimes white. From the beech-groves came the liquid coo of the doves, and the gush of the throstle's song, and the fluting of blackbirds. Nature teemed with music, poetry, and the exuberance of life. Only one thing lacked, thought the girl, to make the day perfect : Charles Cheek should have been there with his joyous humour and lively prattle. At length they reached Prince's Town, and ordered dinner at the inn. Whilst the meal was in preparation, the holiday makers wandered about the prison, and watched the warders and the convicts.

'This is very improving,' said Lazarus. 'It screws up our

morals like the tuning of fiddles. You see, Joanna, the miserable end of men who allow themselves to be found out.'

After dinner, Joanna slipped away, to be alone in the wilderness, and inhale with long draughts the sparkling air that pours into the lungs like atmospheric champagne. She climbed a height, and ensconced herself among the piles of granite, away from the cold wind, in the glow of the glorious sun. To the south lay Plymouth harbour and the glittering sea. Fold on fold of blue hill stretching away for miles to the rugged peaks of the Cornish moors lay to her right.

As she sat in her nook, believing herself alone, she was disturbed by a head with a sailor hat protruding itself from behind a rock. In another moment, Lazarus was before her. He threw himself in the short grass at her feet, picked a rush, and nibbled at the end.

'Joanna,' he said, 'why did you run away? Why did you leave me with old Thresher? What do I care for old Thresher? I brought Thresher to-day as gooseberry picker. In the upper walks of life, to which we are going to belong, gooseberry pickers are the thing. Young people must have them as incumbrances when out junketing. I've left old Thresher examining some pigs fed by the warders off the scraps left by the convicts. Did you mark how the old lady ate? I did. It was a race between us; especially over the roly-poly pudding. She didn't want to have the doughy end without the jam, and I was determined she should. A roly-poly has but two ends, not three, so two must have ends, and only one can enjoy the middle. I was resolved that you should have the best part and that Thresher and I should have the ends. I cared for your interests above my own, you'll allow that, Joanna. I took one end, and Thresher pulled a mow when I gave her the other. Did you see it? But you had the middle, oozing out with whortleberry jam; and that shows, if demonstration were needed' (he lowered his voice), 'how I regard you. I wouldn't have done that in the old days, would I?'

'No, sir!'

'And let me assure you of this, Joanna, the round globe does not contain another woman for whom I would do it now.' He took off his hat, and exposed his forehead scored with a black ring. 'I hope you see, Joanna, what a change has taken place in my feelings towards you. You may have noticed in me the wakings of tenderness of late. Ah, Joanna! do me a favour! You saved my house from fire, my property from

burglars, my throat from their murderous knife. Save now my heart from despair. I offer you my hand ; let us walk together down the flowery path of life, with the roses blushing in our way and the doves cooing over our heads, and with plenty to eat and drink on the journey. Spend, Joanna, what money you like, eat what dainties you desire, dress in what clothes you fancy, and pic-nic when and where you will. Oh, Joanna, "O, that we two were maying," as the song goes, together through life without a Thresher at our side as a sharer of our pudding ! Cease to consider me as your master, and accept me as your husband.'

Then Joanna burst into a ringing laugh.

'Too late, Mr. Lazarus, too late !—not permissible after twelve o'clock.'

'What do you mean?'

'This is the first of April, and you are trying to make of me an April fool.'

'I am serious. I protest, most serious.'

'Then,' said she, 'it is yourself that you have succeeded in converting into a most egregious April fool.'

CHAPTER L.

TO THE RESCUE.

Mr. Charles Cheek was supposed to know nothing of the difficulties of the family, till Lady Grace spoke to him so plainly on the subject. He had, however, heard something from the steward, whose mouth could not keep silence, and his father had told him plainly what he knew. From Mr. Worthivale he heard of the fresh trouble caused by the death of the Archdeacon. Nothing further had passed between him and Lady Grace. She was friendly, and he remained fascinated. There it stopped.

Lord Saltcombe had at last been roused to take a decided step. The General told him of the Duke's objection to the sale of anything, and of the necessity under which they lay of at once finding money. The honour of the house was at stake, and the Marquess visited his father, and was closeted with him for an hour.

When he came out, he went at once to the General.

'The Duke will allow me to act independently; but he desires to be spared particulars. My hands are set free to raise money, but he is not to be consulted how it is to be raised, nor told how it was done when the money is raised. As we want immediate cash, let us have the plate and jewelry overhauled, and get rid of what is not necessary. There is that confounded set of diamonds I bought for Dulcina Rigsby. They cost twelve hundred, and I daresay will fetch two-thirds. As for the family jewelry—I shall never marry, and so the race will expire with me. No Duchess of Kingsbridge will need them. My mother was the last. I have the key to the safe where they are kept.'

'Let us begin at once, and pack what is not in immediate requisition,'

Lord Saltcombe rang the bell for the butler, and ordered the plate chests to be taken into the state drawing-room, not now likely to be used again; also the cases brought there that would be likely to serve for the packing of valuables. Mr. Blomfield obeyed without a muscle of his face working, and soon the grand room was filled with boxes and piles of silver plate, old salvers engraved with arms, supporters, and coronet, punch bowls, centre-pieces, goblets, christening and caudle cups, urns, kettles, tea and coffee pots, ewers, candelabra,—a mass of metal, much of beautiful workmanship.

'That,' said the General, 'is the great silver salver presented to the Field-Marshal by the City of Ghent, of which he was in possession at the time. He was not Duke then; you see the fulsome inscription in Latin. This must be melted up. It will never do to have it sold as it is, to proclaim the straits to which the Eveleighs have been reduced.'

The butler and the footman packed the plate in the green cloth-lined cases. In former times it had been transported with the Duke to town and back to the country. Consequently the proper conveniences for the reception and removal were ready.

'Is not this beautiful?' said the General, pointing to a silver teapot on a lampstand of exquisite workmanship. On one side were represented Chinese picking tea leaves, on the other Chinese ladies sipping the beverage made from them. The groups were enclosed in the most delicate shell and flower work. With it went a cream and a milk jug, and a silver canister, all of equal beauty of workmanship. 'This set be-

longed to George the Second,' said the General; 'he gave it to the Duchess Lavinia on her marriage.'

'Here is my christening cup, out of which I used to drink as a child, and there are the marks of my teeth on it,' said Lord Saltcombe, with forced gaiety.

'This cream bowl ought to be valuable,' remarked Lord Ronald. 'I never saw anything like the delicacy of the work, the festoons of roses and jessamine, with butterflies perched on them. Fortunately the arms are not on it. I suspect it is unique.'

Tray after tray was filled with silver forks and spoons, soup-ladles, great gravy spoons, enough to furnish a Lord Mayor's banquet.

When all the silver was packed that had to be sent away, and the rest, that was to be kept, was laid on the floor, the porcelain was collected.

'Fetch everything from my room, Robert,' said the Marquess; then with a laugh, 'I have been disenchanted with some of my prizes, and doubt the value of the rest. I dare swear I have been egregiously taken in. Anyhow, there can be no questioning the value of these Sèvres vases presented by Charles X., and there is abundance of precious Oriental china all over the house.'

The room was now filled with splendid bowls, great standing vases for pot-pourri, old Dresden figures, Chelsea in abundance, majolica dishes, Capo di Monte white groups, superb specimens of Palissy, services of Crown Derby, Swansea, and Wedgwood, of the most choice and exquisite descriptions. Chimney-piece, plate chests, the floor, were encumbered with them.

The Marquess himself went to the jewel chest, and brought in as much as he could carry. He laid on the table a tray of crimson velvet on which sparkled a tiara, necklace, stomacher, and earrings of diamonds.

'My mother wore these at the coronation of Her Majesty,' said Lord Saltcombe; 'she lost one of the diamonds out of the brooch, and never wore the set again. The place of the missing stone was never filled up; perhaps that was the first symptom of difficulty in finding money.'

A beautiful chain of white pearls with pendants of black pearls attracted his notice.

'How well this would have become Grace,' he said. Then he brought in more, a complete parure of amethysts. Then rings—diamond, topaz, amethyst and diamond, ruby. These

splendid ornaments seemed in the cold daylight to have lost their sparkle, and to be sensible of the general sorrow, decay, and humiliation.

'The pictures must come down,' said Lord Saltcombe. 'The Rubens at Kingsbridge House can be disposed of to the National Gallery, which is short of examples of that master.'

'Will the nation care to spend thousands on fleshy Dutch-women? I doubt it.'

'Some of the paintings in this room are valuable,' said the Marquess. 'Let us have them down, and they can be measured for their cases. That Murillo was bought by the first Duke off the easel of the painter. These Gerard Dows are more interesting than beautiful. There is an Adoration by Porbus, with Philip II. and Alva as two of the Wise Men. Here is a Turner purchased by my father, undescribed by Mr. Ruskin.'

'The Reynolds' portraits—what of them?'

'We will not part with family pictures if we can help it. Let them remain suspended. There is a large Morland with its clump of dark trees, and a pretty Gainsborough, a fine example and worth a large sum. These must certainly come down.'

Lord Saltcombe and the General were standing in the middle of the room, which was strewn with treasures. Most of the silver was packed, only that left out which was reserved for use. The china was about, some being packed in hay; the jewels in their trays were spread out on the tables; the pictures were unhung—when—the door opened, and Lady Grace entered with Mr. Charles Cheek and Lucy.

Lady Grace saw in a moment what was being done, and coloured and stood still. Lucy also understood the situation, and was seized with a fit of trembling. The occasion of their entry was this—Charles had said, in the course of conversation, that he had never seen the state rooms, whereupon Lady Grace, unaware of what was taking place, had volunteered to show him through them.

'Packing for removal to town,' said the General. 'Rather late in the season, but better late than never.'

Charles Cheek was not deceived. He drew back. He was moved. It was sad to see the break-up of a noble family, to stand, so to speak, beside its deathbed. He withdrew from the room at once, and halted on the staircase outside the door, and with agitation in his voice and face and manner, he said,

'Lady Grace! will you give me a right to fly to your assistance, and prevent this humiliation.'

'Yes,' she answered with calmness, 'I will.'

That night Charles Cheek hastened to town by express that reached Paddington at 4 A.M.

He was at his father's house before the old man was up, and he awaited him in the breakfast-room. Charles was in a condition of feverish excitement, in spite of his cold night-journey. A servant had taken him to a room where he had washed and changed his clothes.

The old man came in, spruce as ever, in his black cloth frock coat, a white shirtfront, stretching his arms, and then rubbing his hands.

'Governor!' exclaimed Charles, 'I have been waiting to see you these two hours and a half, burning with impatience. I have something of importance to communicate.'

'Ugh! Want money?'

'No—that is—not for myself.'

'Ugh! Still—want it.'

'That is not my primary reason for coming here.'

The old man puffed himself out and stood by the fire, winking and rubbing his hands, and glowering at his son.

'I have just returned from Court Royal. I have spoken to Lady Grace, and she has consented——'

The father shook his head doubtfully.

'It is a fact, governor, I give you my word. She gave me the promise in the presence of Lucy Worthivale. Some time before she all but promised, but yesterday she was explicit.'

The old man rubbed his hands vigorously, thrust his arms forward, flashing his cuffs, then hiding them again.

'By Ginger!' he said, 'what a chap you are!'

'Do you mistrust me?'

'Mistrust? No. I didn't think you equal to it, though. You are a fine fellow, that you are. The girl has sense. Ginger! she'll make a Lord Charlie of you.'

'Hardly,' laughed Charles; 'the wife does not ennoble the husband.'

'Don't she? She should. We'll change the law. Make it a political question. Don't tell me she'll flatten down into Mrs. Charles Cheek!'

'Not quite that. But never mind. We have not got to that point. I want you, father, to act promptly. I have come by night express, and must return to-day.'

'What do you mean to do?'

'You will remember what you undertook. The family are in immediate want of money. If you are satisfied with what I have done, give me leave to stop the sale of their valuables.'

'What! got to that pass! A galloping consumption. When I undertake a thing, I do it; I'll take up the mortgages to the tune I scored, but I won't tear them up till the marriage is accomplished.'

Charles explained what the immediate need was.

'Very well,' said the old man; give me a bill of sale on the furniture and plate and pictures, and I'll advance the money. I'm not such a fool as to give without security.'

That was the utmost Charles could obtain from his father.

'There is no knowing,' said the old man. 'The young woman may mean right enough, but the aristocratical relations may interfere, and blow themselves out with pride, and refuse consent; then—what about my money? As for the mortgages, I'll see to them at once. Those of Emmanuel shall be taken up immediately, and when the registers are signed, I'll tear them to shreds. As for ready money, I'll advance something on the stock-in-trade, but only if I have a bill on them to enable me to seize in default of fulfilment of conditions.'

Charles was obliged to be content with this. He returned the same day to Kingsbridge.

'You've had a long journey,' said Mr. Worthivale. 'I was amazed when told you had gone to town. Nothing the matter with your father, I hope?'

'Nothing at all,' answered the young man. Then, after looking inquiringly at the steward, 'I say, do you recall a certain conversation you had with my father?'

'Bless my soul! he overflowed with conversation, and every word was precious. To what do you particularly allude?'

Mr. Worthivale knew very well what was meant, but he was reluctant to have this topic retouched. Lucy had told him nothing. With his ideas, the suggestion of old Cheek had seemed to him a sort of blasphemy.

'Well,' said Charles Cheek, 'it has come about after all. Lady Grace has passed her word to me.'

'Stuff and nonsense.'

'It is a fact. I went up to town last night to communicate it to my father. If you are in immediate need of cash he will advance it on the security of the contents of Court Royal and Kingsbridge House.'

Mr. Worthivale coloured.

'Lady Grace! Impossible.' The steward was stupefied. 'Why, you are nothing, literally nothing, one of the people; and your father is in'—with a shudder—'trade!'

'I assure you it is so. Ask Lucy. She was present.'

'You misunderstood her. It is impossible. Sheer impossible. Your head has been turned. I ought never to have introduced you.'

'I repeat; she has consented.'

'But—the Duke—and the Marquess—and Lord Ronald, what will they say?'

'They have not been asked.'

'You had better not ask them. As you value your happiness and my regard—don't. For Heaven's sake, don't.'

'Mr. Worthivale, excuse me, but you seem to think that the advantage is all on my side. Yesterday Lord Saltcombe and Lord Ronald were packing the valuables to be sent to London for sale. There is therefore desperate immediate need of money. I come offering to relieve them from their difficulties—at least from those most urgent. The mortgages to the amount of two hundred thousand pounds will be taken up by my father, and on our marriage he will give them over. The pictures may be rehung, the plate unpacked, the jewels and china replaced. I do not know what the sum is in immediate requisition, but my father is ready to advance it—so long as it is under ten thousand—on receipt of the consent of the Duke and the Marquess to the contents of these two houses, of which you will furnish a list, being the security for the sum.'

'Not a word of this to them! Lord Saltcombe will never forgive me. My goodness! What presumption there is in the rising generation! To them nothing is sacred! I suppose, sir, you are a blazing Radical!'

'I have no political opinions, having nothing to gain or lose.'

'Leave this matter in my hands,' said the steward. 'I will see the Duke. I will manage about the bill. I must rush off now, and stop the packing of the pictures and the carriage of the plate. I was to have gone to town with all the things, and done my best with them.'

'You are welcome to arrange with the Duke about the bill, but I cannot have you interfere between me and Lady Grace.'

'I—I! I would not dream of mentioning it. You have been deluded.'

'By whom? By Lady Grace?'

'Heaven forbid. She is incapable of falsehood. By your own inordinate vanity, which has deluded you into hearing things that were never said and seeing things that were never done. It is impossible. As soon make me believe the common people here when they tell me they have seen the sun dance on Easter morning.'

Worthivale said no more. He was convinced that the young man had dreamed. It mattered little. The immediate advantage of the dream was great. The precious collections of Court Royal were saved for a time. Time was what he wanted. In time the Marquess would marry and shake old Cheek and all other Old Men of the Mountain off his shoulders who weighed him down and plucked the golden fruit and left him starving. In time Bigbury Bay would become a rival to Torquay, and make the Eveleighs as Torquay had made the Palks. In time the slate quarries would rout all other slates out of the market. In time the shale would distil petroleum. What mattered it, if for a while the young man were left dancing in darkness with bandaged eyes. He would some day see his folly, and blush at his temerity.

Meantime—Providence was interfering for the salvation of the Eveleighs.

CHAPTER LI.

THE FLYING-FISH.

JOANNA carried her point. She went to the ball. She had set her heart upon it. No dissuasion would turn her from her purpose, no difficulty discourage her. Go she would, and go she did.

The Easter ball was qualified by selectness. If it was nothing else, it was select. On this it prided itself. The most rigid censorship was exercised over the admissions by the committee. No one without blood, or—this was a concession—money was allowed. The committee sat at a table, and the names were passed from one to another. It was like running the gauntlet. Only those that came out unscathed between the lines were allowed to appear. The nobility and the county families patronised and attended it. The Earl and Countess of

Mount Batten, Lord and Lady Laira, Sir John and Lady St. Austell, patronised the ball, and gave it the stamp of selectness. The generals and their ladies, the admirals and their parties, all the J.P.s and the J.P. fowl attended, and added their insistence to its selectness. The ball was so select that it hedged itself round with the most exclusive and arbitrary restrictions. It drew a line here, and a line there. It put its foot down at this point, and at that, for no reason possible of explanation to anyone without the bump of selection on his skull. The ball was so select that no lady with the soil of trade on her fingers could hold them out for a ticket. It was so select that, of the Church, only the wives and daughters of rectors might enter; the females whose orbit is in a Peel district and revolve about vicars and curates, were shut out. It was so select that the family of the wine-merchant were as rigidly excluded as the family of the pastry-cook who united with the wine-merchant to furnish the supper.

On the Cornish coast folk say, when the wind wails at the windows, that the ghosts of drowned sailors are without, flattening their spiritual noses against the panes, dabbing their dripping palms against the glass, weeping because excluded in wind and rain from the warmth and light within. Outside the great assembly-room, the spirits of unnumbered women wept and wrung their hands. The ball was too select for them. Let them dance on their own low levels, and not aspire to circle in the system of the social planets.

This Easter ball was quite a different affair from the October and the hunt balls, when the room was occupied by cliques, and the cliques danced together, ignoring the cliques below them, and went to supper and ate in cliques, and talked in cliques, and flirted in cliques, and clacked in cliques. This ball was emphatically a one-clique ball.

Yet, into this most select of balls Joanna thrust herself. This was how it was done.

Mr. Lazarus had lent money to the Hon. Mrs. Yellowleaf, and he sent her a note to say that unless the loan were repaid by a certain date, he would County Court her.

Mrs. Yellowleaf came down to his private office in great trepidation. She had not the money; she was in daily expectation of a remittance from an aunt. She entreated Mr. Lazarus to delay. Mr. Lazarus was inexorable. He wanted his money. He had heavy bills to meet by a certain day.

Mrs. Yellowleaf had promised repeatedly to repay the loan, and had not done so. His patience was exhausted. He was a poor man, he had put himself to great inconvenience to find her the money; if she could not or would not pay, he must cast her into court, and if that failed, he would put in an execution. Mrs. Yellowleaf turned green at the threat, and nearly fainted.

'I cannot find the money,' she said—'I simply cannot. My husband, as you know, is with the China squadron. My remittances have not arrived. My aunt is very kind, but she is out of humour with me just now, and I dare not press for more.'

When he had reduced her to a condition of abject despair, then only did he offer relief. Relief could be bought—but on hard terms. She must take under her protection to the ball a young lady who particularly desired to attend.

The Hon. Mrs. Yellowleaf was aghast. This was a sheer impossibility. She *could* not, she *would* not run such a risk. The tears came into her eyes. She knew nothing of the 'person,' neither her name, nor character, nor antecedents. The ball was most select. She might get into serious social trouble by taking there an individual unqualified to associate with good society. There were so many denied admission whose claims were urgent.

'Very well,' said Lazarus, rising. 'Then prepare to see your name in the West of England papers. You shall have your summons to-morrow.'

'Who is she?' asked Mrs. Yellowleaf, after a pause for consideration.

Lazarus explained that she was a Miss Rosevere, an heiress, an orphan, of irreproachable character. 'No relations in Plymouth, none that I know of in Devon or Cornwall.'

'What is she like?' asked Mrs. Yellowleaf, doubtfully.

'Like!—there won't be one in the room will surpass her in looks, I can assure you.'

'She is not—not an Israelite.' She thought 'Jewess' might sound rude, so she said 'Israelite.'

'You need not fear. Not a bit. Cornish—comes from the dark lot down the coast by Veryan and Goran; dark hair, dark eyes, olive skin. She'll be the belle of the ball and the richest girl there too.'

The Hon. Mrs. Yellowleaf drew a sigh of relief.

'Very well, Mr. Lazarus, if you will not press for payment, I will take the young lady. I trust she dresses well.'

'Dress!—she'll dress as well as the best, I promise you.'

So it was settled. Mrs. Yellowleaf was uneasy about her undertaking, but unable to evade it.

On the evening of the ball Joanna was seen into a cab by Mr. Lazarus. 'Ah, lack-a-day!' said he, as he shut the door on her, 'I can't go with you, but it ain't possible. The sight of me in the assembly-room would be too much for the nerves of some folk there.'

The Hon. Mrs. Yellowleaf's carriage led the way, followed by Joanna's cab. The lady had just seen her in the hall. She was sorry that she had no place in her own carriage to offer Miss Rosevere, as her daughters and son went with her; if Miss Rosevere would follow in her fly, she would await her in the entrance or disrobing room.

Accordingly she saw Joanna when she put off her cloak and shawl. She looked scrutinisingly at her, and was struck by her beauty. She turned sharply round, with motherly apprehension, and caught an admiring expression in her son's face. 'I wonder whether she be really an heiress!' thought Mrs. Yellowleaf. 'Possibly enough that, being a stranger, she may not have known anyone to whom to apply.'

She thereupon softened towards the girl, and spoke to her amiably. Joanna had much less dialect than one of her status might be supposed to be infected with, for she had not associated with other girls at the Barbican. She had grown up alone, talking only to Lazarus, who had no provincial brogue. His English was passable. Joanna's was also passable, though not the language of perfect culture. Mrs. Yellowleaf knew, the moment she opened her mouth, that she had not the bringing up of a lady. A very few words sufficed. 'Ah!' she thought, 'some mining captain's daughter, who made a fortune in tin, and left it to her. She has money, but not breed. Still, she has money. After all, nowadays, money is everything.' That was to be her explanation, if asked about Joanna. 'My dear, an acquaintance whom I could not refuse asked me to be civil to the young lady. People are very inconsiderate. They ask you to carry parcels for them, and stand chaperon to all sorts and conditions of girls. It ought not to be done. As for this Miss Rosevere, I know nothing about her, except that *elle est une bonne partie*, worth, I am told, but I do not know, three thousand a year.' That is what she would say. What she

thought was, 'Three thousand will obscure bad intonation and grammatical slips.'

As she went upstairs she wondered whether it would be well to allow John-Conolly, her son, to take a fancy to the girl. 'Not,' she considered, 'till I know exactly her value. Her father's will can be seen in the Probate Court for a shilling.'

She touched one of her daughters. 'My dear Lettice,' she whispered, 'if Mr. Charles Cheek should ask you to dance, be civil. It is true that his antecedents leave much to be desired, but he has, and will have, money.'

Mr. Cheek was there, much disappointed at not being able to appear in company with Lady Grace and the Marquess. Still, though debarred their companionship, Charles was not disposed to forego the gratification. He was becoming very tired of the uniformity of life in the country, and depressed by the cloud of troubles which hung over Court Royal. At first he did not observe Joanna. But on going up to speak to the Hon. Mrs. Yellowleaf, and engage Miss Lettice for a dance, his eye met that of Joanna. A look of incredulity, then of blank amazement, then of amused delight, swept across his face. 'Halloo!'—he checked himself when 'Joe' was on his lips, and substituted 'Miss Rosevere.'

'You know Miss Rosevere?' asked Mrs. Yellowleaf in trepidation. She had noticed the change of expression in his face.

'Oh yes! old acquaintances,' answered Charles, with his eyes still on Joanna, full of wonder and question.

'Where have you met?' asked Mrs. Yellowleaf.

'At—at—the Duke of Kingsbridge's—Court Royal,' answered Charles, dashing at the first name that occurred to him.

'How is the Duke?' asked Joanna, with composure. 'And dear old Lord Ronald? So grieved to see that the Archdeacon is dead. The blow must have been severe to his Grace. The brothers were so attached.'

'Oh, well—that is, not very well. I am just come from Court Royal.'

'Indeed,' said Joanna. 'And sweet Lady Grace, and Lucy Worthivale?'

'They are well,' answered Charles, puzzled beyond description. How did the girl know anything about the Eveleighs?

'You were not at the Christmas ball,' said Joanna, 'when the Rigsbys were staying at the Court, and everyone supposed

Dulcina would become Marchioness. Yonder she is—with her coffee-coloured father. How tastelessly she does dress! I must go over and speak to her. Come with me, Mr. Cheek.'

'Joe!' he whispered, as he escorted her across the room, 'of all wonders this is the most wonderful!'

'Am I out of my element—the flying-fish among gulls?'

'Not a bit.'

'How do you do, Miss Rigsby?' said Joanna, extending her hand. 'I am afraid you do not recollect me; but we met at Court Royal during the winter.'

Dulcina looked at her uncertainly. She could not remember the face; but was that wonderful? She had met so many strangers at the Court. She was glad, however, to be recognised, and to have someone to speak to, as she knew few ladies in Plymouth.

The Hon. Mrs. Yellowleaf nudged her son. 'John-Conolly,' she said, 'you see the plain-faced, gorgeously-dressed girl that Miss Rosevere is speaking to. She is an undoubted heiress. Go and secure her hand for as many dances as you can. Be very civil to her, and bear in mind that you must either work or marry money.'

'Mother, I'd a thousand times rather dance with that charming girl you brought here.'

'Dance with both. Try to be struck with both, and let them perceive it; but be cautious with the Rosevere. *Il me faut prendre des renseignements.*'

'Who is that very striking young lady yonder?' asked Mrs. Fothergill, wife of a country squire.

'That,' answered Mrs. Yellowleaf, 'is a Cornish heiress. Between me, you, and the post—money made in mines. However, the Kingsbridge family have taken her up, and put the cachet on her. Lady Grace Eveleigh and the Marquess are unable to be here, owing to the death of their uncle, the Archdeacon. As they could not come with a party, I was asked to bring Miss Rosevere. Very rich and handsome, though somewhat wanting in polish.'

'Joey,' said Charles Cheek, when no one was by to hear, 'this is roaring fun. You are the most audacious little rogue I ever came across. You thrust yourself in here—anywhere that you have a mind. And then—you extort a hundred pounds from my father! Oh, Joe, I have never thanked you for that. It was good of you. But conceive how staggered I was when my father ran up alongside without showing signals, and poured a broadside into me because I had got myself

entangled with a little pawn. Put me down for a score of dances, Joe. I had rather dance with you than with any other girl, and talk of something different from the weather and the primroses.'

But this might not be. Joanna had no lack of partners. The rumour spread that she was a Cornish heiress—taken up by the Kingsbridge family. There was no question as to her beauty, or to her ease of manner and movement. Ease of manner was given by complete self-assurance. Ease of movement by the fact that she had lived all her life in slippers.

'Cheek,' said an officer, 'surely that is the girl I saw in the stage-box the night of that frightful accident. You went up and talked to her. We asked you then who she was.'

'Yes, and I told you.'

'You told us she was an heiress, and were disinclined to introduce us. It is mean of a man like you, with such prospects, to keep the heiresses to yourself.'

'You are too dangerous a rival,' answered Charles, laughing. 'But it is not true; I leave the field clear about Miss Rigsby.'

'What an uncommonly good-looking girl that is,' said one mother, against the wall, to another standard medlar. 'Not quite happy about her extraction, I understand.'

'Rather odd in speech, I hear,' answered the latter. 'But the Kingsbridge people have taken her up on account of her money, and there is a rumour of the Marquess of Saltcombe becoming engaged to her, now he is off with Miss Rigsby. They could not come because they are in mourning, so they asked Mrs. Yellowleaf to be responsible for her.'

'Dear me! I had no idea Mrs. Yellowleaf was intimate with the Eveleighs. I hear queer reports about the Kingsbridge family—very shaky, I understand.'

'Ah, bah! Every planet has its occultations, and comes out of the shadow as bright as before. *You* never have known what it is to be in financial eclipse, I suppose.'

Joanna was dancing with Charles Cheek.

'You do not know how you are perplexing the old ladies,' he said. 'As for the men, they are infatuated. Take care, Joe, that you leave no joint in your armour open for an arrow to enter. Some of the markswomen will be spanning their bows at you before the night wears to day.'

'What a pity you were not at the Christmas ball at Court Royal,' said Joanna, without noticing his warning. 'I mean,

of course, the first ball: the second was only for the tenants and servants. The room—the grand ball-room, you know it—was superb with its painted groups in panel, of the time of Louis XIV. It belonged to the older house, and was incorporated in the new mansion built by the late Duke. And the crystal lustres twinkling with rainbow-tinted light! And the drawing-room—do you know the pictures there? The Gainsborough, and the Murillo; the Sèvres vases given by Charles X.'

'Joe!' exclaimed Charles, 'you will drive me mad. Are you a witch? Have you the gift of second sight? How come you to know anything about the rooms and people at Court Royal?'

'Never mind. I will not tell you.'

'I am cross with you for one thing, Joe. You might have been sure I would have been here to-night, and it would have been graceful to wear the Roman pearls I gave you. They were only Roman pearls, true, but the chain was pretty.'

'I could not. I had given it away.'

'Oh, Joe! how could you do that?'

'I gave it to the best of women.'

'Who can that be? I know one whom I think that.'

'It is the same. She has it—Lady Grace Eveleigh.'

Charles Cheek stood still in the midst of the dance. 'You gave my necklace to her!—Impossible.'

'Ask her next time you meet. She will tell you it is true. Now tell me something. How come you to know Court Royal?'

'That is easily answered. Mr. Worthivale, the steward, is my cousin. I have been staying with him, in exile—because of you. My father has sent me there into banishment.'

'That is why I have not seen you in Plymouth?'

'Yes—and—, I will confide something more to you that affects me greatly. You will hear it talked about shortly. I am going to marry Lady Grace Eveleigh.'

Joanna stood still, and stared at him. 'Impossible!' she said.

'It is true—I assure you it is true.'

'I will dance no more,' said Joanna abruptly. 'Take me to a chair.'

'Remember you owe me the next waltz.'

'I will not dance with you again.'

She remained seated during several dances; the gentlemen

came round her, entreating her to honour them, but she refused all. She said she was tired.

At first Joanna was occupied with her own thoughts, and paid no attention to what passed about her, but she presently woke to the sense that she had seated herself in a wasp's nest. The ladies around her were faded beauties or mothers, and resented the arrival of a stranger on their preserves who carried off the beaux from themselves or from their daughters.

By slow degrees she was roused to give attention to the conversation that went on about her, and to become aware that words were flying around barbed and poisoned.

'Who is that child in pink yonder?' asked a handsome lady on the verge of thirty, who must at one time have been a queen of beauty. 'Can you tell me, Mrs. Delany? It is cruel to send children who cannot be over seventeen, and ought to be in bed and sleeping.'

The lady addressed sat on the other side of Joanna. Joanna looked sharply round; she was curious to see Mrs. Delany, in whose service she was supposed to have been so many years. That lady shrugged her shoulders contemptuously, and, returning Joanna's stare, answered the faded beauty.

'My dear, how can I tell? The ball has ceased to be select. What the committee can be about is more than I can answer, admitting persons of whom one knows nothing.'

'Is that worse,' asked Joanna innocently, 'than giving characters to servants you have never seen? There was much talk of a lady having done this when I was at Court Royal.'

Mrs. Delany turned crimson, and sat back.

'I have known quite nameless, unknown persons give themselves out as friends of people of rank,' said a lady on the other side of Mrs. Delany, 'who turned out on inquiry to have been governesses or companions in the family.'

'I have heard,' said Joanna, 'of gentlemen so absolutely nameless nothings that they have had to borrow their wives' names and get knighted in them.'

The lady put up her fan instantly.

'What bad form it is, Lady Hawkins,' said the ex-queen, 'in unmarried girls wearing jewelry!' and her eyes rested on a necklet round Joanna's throat.

'I beg your pardon,' said Joanna. 'Is Mrs. Gathercole addressing me? I ask because I see you wearing a brooch I coveted the other day, but I was too late—it was sold to Captain Gathercole.'

She felt—she did not see—a shiver of suppressed laughter about her. The fading beauty turned deadly white, rose and left the place.

'What a pity it is,' said the lady who took the vacated chair, addressing Mrs. Delany across Joanna, 'that the possession of money should be deemed a sufficient qualification for admission! There are persons in this room who have no other right to be here.'

'But there are persons admitted who have not even money qualifications,' said Joanna. 'Persons glad to get a guinea from the Jews for a gown of old gold and black lace.'

The lady sprang up as if she had been stung, and Mrs. Delany burst out laughing; the old gold with black lace was well known.

'As for Cornish mines in which some people have their money,' remarked another, who had not spoken before, 'I am well assured that such property is as unsatisfactory ascas tles in Spain.'

'Or,' observed Joanna, speaking aloud but addressing no one, 'or as husbands at sea, always at sea, but never seen, like the Flying Dutchman.'

In the midst of the silence that ensued, Charles Cheek came up and offered her his arm. She rose and took it. Her colour was heightened and her eyes sparkled.

'Good heavens, Joe! What have you been doing? You have set all the women against you!'

'The flying-fish can snap as well as the gulls,' she replied.

CHAPTER LII.

ON THE PIER.

When Mrs. Yellowleaf was ready to leave, she intimated her intention somewhat curtly to Joanna. Charles Cheek at once flew to assist her to her cab and muffle her in wraps. Mrs. Yellowleaf's carriage was first packed and driven off. Then Charles said, 'Are you by yourself? That must not be. Allow me to accompany you to the Barbican, and see you safely home.' He waited for no reply, but stepped into the carriage beside Joanna.

'Oh, Joe!' he said, 'you have made mortal enemies. Your

mots have been passed round the room, and those whom you stabbed will never forgive you. How did you know anything about Sir William Hawkins taking his wife's name, and being knighted in it, because he was—well, without a name of his own? And that affair of Captain Gathercole and Miss Fanshawe, and Mrs. Duncombe—whose husband never turns up—and the rest?'

'I know everything about people in Plymouth—it is part of the business.'

'You will never, never be forgiven.'

'I am not likely to meet these people again.'

'Did you enjoy yourself?'

'For a while—and then I did not care for the ball any more.'

'Why not?'

She did not answer.

The cab was dismissed at the Barbican, and Charles paid the driver.

'Joe,' said he, 'come on to the pier, and let us look at the water rippling in the moon. It will be dawn directly.'

She hesitated a moment, and then said, 'Very well; I want to tell you something.'

He gave her his arm. 'You are not likely to catch cold, I hope!'

She shook her head.

'The more I see of you,' said he, 'the more I wonder at you. You are a person of infinite resource. Joe! tell me you are not cross with me for what I confided to you.'

'Not a bit,' she answered. 'I told you to aim at position, and you have followed my advice.'

'It was my father's doing.'

'Do you not love and admire her? You must—you must do that! Why, I do! I love her still.'

'Of course I admire Lady Grace. Never can fail to do that. I love her also—well—in about the same fashion as a Catholic loves and adores the Virgin.'

'Are you satisfied with what you have done?'

'I will empty my whole heart before you,' he said. 'I know you are capable of advising me—of encouraging me.' He sighed. 'I daren't say all I think!'

She laughed. 'In the same breath hot and cold. You will and you won't. You can and you can't.'

'Do not sneer at me. I am in a difficulty. I assure you I

have been mortally weary of the life at Court Royal Lodge. Old Worthivale, the steward, is a sort of cousin of mine, and infinitely tedious. Beavis, his son, is too occupied with the family failure to give me much of his company, and he has not that in him to afford me entertainment. I have hunted twice a week, but now the hunting is over. Five days a week I am consumed with *ennui*. I go to the club in Kingsbridge, and try to find some fellows with whom to play billiards, but sometimes no one is there : the day is fine, and they want to boat ; or the day is wet, and they want to read novels at home over the fire. Then they all talk shop—local shop. They seem to me like a cage of animals bred in confinement, who can only think and feel interest and talk of the world within the bars of their cage. If I had not passed my word to my father, I would have run long ago.'

'Is there no attraction, then ?'

'I allow there is Lady Grace. She is beautiful, sweet as an angel. She is kind to me, but never affectionate, and I cannot conceive it possible that we shall ever stand nearer to each other than we do at present. Of course we can be married, but that will not fuse my soul into hers and hers into mine, because we have so little in common. We have different specific gravities. When we are together, and I see her gentle face and hear her soft tones I am under a charm which holds me—at a distance. The charm draws and repels at once. Can you understand ? I feel that I love her, but I feel also that she is unapproachable by such as me. If we do get married, we shall be like a two-volumed book, of which the volumes belong to different editions, and are in different type and of different sizes. We shall belong to each other so far that we shall bear the same label, but she will belong to an *édition de luxe*, and I to the cheap and popular issue.'

'Then why did you propose to Lady Grace ? Was it merely to obtain position ?'

'No, Joe. My father wished it, urged it, badgered me into it. I liked her, I cannot do other than like her. I pity the family. And then—the Worthivales put me on my metal.'

'How so ?'

'They scouted the possibility of my winning her. They seemed to regard me as the dirt of the street aspiring to the sun.'

'Do you think you will not be happy with her ?'

'I shall go to church with her and never get out of it again. We shall carry the church with its solemnity and oppressiveness and mustiness into our married life. Our tendencies are diverse as those of a balloon and a diving-bell. We shall have as little intellectual sympathy as John Bright and a "Blackwood," which he was cutting and trying to read. I belong too much to Bohemia, with the city of Prague as my Jerusalem.'

'If that be so, you are in a false position, and must leave it.'

'I cannot,' answered Charles. 'I cannot do so without cruelty. The family are in straits for money. My father has undertaken to pay off the most pressing mortgages and debts. If the marriage does not come off they will be utterly ruined. Do you know I stopped the sale of their pictures, plate, and jewels? All were being packed to send to London; when I got Lady Grace's promise, I galloped to town on the back of an engine, and got my father to advance the necessary money to stop the sale.'

'Does Lady Grace marry you to save her family?'

'I do not know that she is aware of the compact—but—I suppose she must,' he added humbly. 'She never would take me for myself. The brazen pot and the earthen pot are going to float down the stream together, and we shall have to keep our distance for fear of jars.'

Joanna stood on the pier looking out at the promontory of Mount Batten that seemed to landlock the harbour. The moon was behind the citadel, steeping the Barbican in night, but the water beyond flashed like quicksilver. She folded her arms under her wraps. Charles tried to read her face, but there was no moonlight on it, and the pier-lantern was high above, casting a shadow over her.

'Well, Joe, what do you think?'

'Give me time to consider.'

'I am in this position. If I marry her I shall gain that which you have bidden me aim for, and shall have pleased my father, and saved a worthy family from utter destruction. On the other hand, I shall have sacrificed my independence and cut myself off from the rollicking life that suits me. I shall live in a social strait-waistcoat, and I hate restraint. If I do not go through with the matter I shall make the governor furious; he will never forgive me, and the Duke will go to pieces. Is it honourable and fair for me to back out?'

'No, Mr. Cheek, it is not. Go on,' said Joanna, and sighed.

'I thought you would say so,' observed Charles, also with a sigh, 'but I hoped that your advice would be contrary.'

Then neither spoke for some time. Far away, behind the hills to the east, the sky was beginning to whiten, but the moon shone so brightly that the tokens of coming day were hardly perceptible.

'We are old friends, are we not?' said Charles sadly.

'Yes—we have known each other since last fifth of November.'

'What a time it seems since then! So much has happened that it is an age to me.'

'Also to me. To me it has been the change from childhood to womanhood, from outward hardship to inward suffering. It cannot be other. Mr. Cheek, we must part. We shall see each other no more.'

'No more!' he echoed. 'Nonsense, I intend to see a great deal of you when allowed to return from exile.'

She shook her head. 'It cannot be.'

'Why not? The Golden Balls is here, and the door open. If I choose to enter with a pair of silver spoons, who is to thrust me out? And if there be no customers in the shop, I suppose I may perch on the counter and enjoy a pleasant chat?'

'No,' she said, 'never again. You told me yourself you were going into social stays. You are changing your nationality, and about to forget Bohemia.'

'Not yet,—no—no! I will enjoy my freedom for a while longer.'

'There is a further reason why I cannot allow it,' she said, and looked before her into the dark water, and beyond it to the glittering sheet of wavering silver. 'I am going to be married.'

'Married! you—Joanna!'

Both stood silent, so silent that nothing was audible but the lapping of the water on the steps of the pier

'Joanna! I will not believe it. To whom?'

'To Lazarus.'

'Joanna!' There was mingled pain and horror in his tone. She said nothing more, but shivered, though wrapped up well in shawls.

'Come hither,' said Charles, almost roughly. 'The first

time I saw you, I took you to the light to see your face; and the face I then saw has haunted me ever since. Come here, and let me see your face again. I will see if this be cursed earnest or cruel joke.' He drew her within the radiance of the lamp, and turned the head up. She offered no resistance, but looked firmly at him.

There was no mischief lurking in the dimples at the corners of her mouth, no devilry in her eyes. There were dark lines in her face, gloom in her deep great irises, and set determination in her mouth. She felt that the hand that raised her chin to expose her face was trembling and cold. She was glad when he withdrew it, and her face relapsed into shadow. Perhaps she could not have maintained composure much longer under the scrutiny of his eyes.

'I cannot help myself,' she said in a low voice. 'Judge for yourself if I can. Lazarus has resolved that I shall be his wife. I suppose he is afraid of losing me unless he ties me fast. But what can I do? I have no home, no father. I must wait here till my mother returns. I am number 617. I have been 617 in the shop for seven years. Everything else in the shop has changed, but I have remained. Old goods have gone, and new come in, and the same numbers have represented scores of new objects; only 617 has not changed. Some of the articles have been redeemed, but I have not. Some have lapsed, and I am lapsing. Some have been sold, and I am about to be sold. I remain uncancelled in the books, 617, and nothing can cancel me but the return of my mother or the expiration of my time. Here I must remain. I am not free. I dare not go. What would my mother say were I to run away? She would be ashamed of her child. What if she were to return, and I were gone—should we ever meet again? Lazarus would never tell her where I was if I had left him—even if he knew, just out of spite to her and me. But it is not that, not that,' she said sadly; 'I daresay you can't understand me, but I feel it here.' She touched her heart. 'It would not be right. I cannot go. You have a Christian conscience because you have been brought up as a Christian. I have a pawnbroking conscience because I have been brought up as a pawnbroker. There are different denominations and different consciences belonging to them. What is right to one is wrong to another. All that I know of right and wrong Lazarus has taught me, or it has grown up unsown, like the grass and weeds in my back yard, that shoot between the

stones. It stands written in fire on my heart that I cannot go without the duplicate, and that if Lazarus chooses to make me his wife I cannot help myself. If I go against that writing, all light will go black before my eyes, and I shall be blind.'

'Oh, Joe! Joe! it must not be!' Charles spoke in pain.

'How can I escape?'

'The thought is too terrible; that hateful, loathsome Jew—and you—you!' He caught her arm, and drew it through his and paced the pier. 'It maddens me; I must work off my fever. You do not mean it. You say it out of frolic to torture me, and when you have driven me to desperation, you will burst forth into one of your fresh laughs. Is it not so?'

'No, it is true.'

'But you cannot like him.'

'I respect him as a master. I hate him as a lover.'

'Joe, it must not be. Run away. Go into service; if you want money, I will give you all I have; sell the very clothes off my back to support you. Trust me, try me; I will work the flesh off my fingers to save you from so hateful a fate. I am in earnest; you will not believe me. You have known me only as an idler and a good-for-naught. I have had no one to care for, nothing to work for. Promise me, promise me you will not——' His voice gave way. He could not finish his sentence.

'My friend,' she said quietly, 'I cannot run away. I have told you so already. It would be wrong according to my pawnbroking conscience. I cannot receive your money, that would be wrong according to my womanly conscience. I cannot remain with Lazarus, except as his wife, now that he has asked me to be that. That also, according to my womanly conscience, would be wrong. If he had not asked me, I could have remained, and I would have remained, as hitherto, working, starving, bargaining, begging, lying for him. As that cannot be, there remains a single door of escape.'

'Then escape by it,' said Charles.

'You wish it?' she asked quietly, looking him full in the face.

'Certainly, anything rather than—— But what is it?'

She shook her head and drew a long deep sigh.

'Let me go!' she said; for he was still holding her wrist.

'No, tell me.'

She suddenly extricated herself from his grasp.

The white light was spreading in the eastern sky, and the moon, struck with paralysis, failed and became dim.

'Joe!' he said, and covered his eyes. 'Now only, when about to lose you, do I begin to realise what you are to me.'

He looked up, looked around, she was gone.

CHAPTER LIII.

ANOTHER DISAPPOINTMENT.

Charles Cheek returned to Court Royal Lodge. He had lost his brightness. He was troubled about himself and about Joanna. He had become engaged to Lady Grace without being really in love with her. He liked a free and easy life, and the formalities of Court Royal were intolerable to him. He liked variety, and one day at the Park was like another. He was naturally of a joyous and careless spirit, and he was forced by circumstances to think, and think seriously; hating responsibilities, he had entangled himself in a net of them, and saw no way of escape out of them.

The Duke said one day to his daughter, that it was well to encourage the young man to be at the Court, for he heard he was very well off, and it was high time for Lucy to get married.

'He is gentlemanly and agreeable. He knows his place. We must not be selfish and keep Lucy to ourselves.'

Lady Grace turned her face aside. It did not occur to the Duke as possible that young Cheek looked higher.

'Should this come about, as I hope it will,' said the old man, 'it will be our duty and pleasure to make a handsome provision for Lucy. She has been devoted to you and to our whole house. We must not deal shabbily in the matter. I will speak to Worthivale about it.'

'For pity's sake, papa, not a word,' entreated his daughter, laying her delicate hands on his arm, whilst a little colour fluttered about her face, like the flush of the cloud when touched by the setting sun.

'As you will,' said the Duke; 'I only suggested it; but in these delicate matters a stranger's hand must not meddle.'

Lucy watched her friend closely. She knew that Lady Grace had no dislike to Charles; she knew also that she did not love him. Lucy was able to read her heart like an open

letter, and she saw that Grace was sacrificing herself solely for the sake of her father and brother. Did she realise the greatness of the sacrifice? Was the preservation of the estates worth it?

Lucy was glad of an opportunity to be with her brother one day to talk to him on the subject.

Beavis was looking careworn and sad. He knew that Lady Grace was engaged to Charles Cheek. The money advanced on the security of the furniture and plate had assured him of that. He took Lucy's arm. They were walking in the garden under a brick wall, against which oranges and limes were trained. The scent of orange flowers was on the air. During a frost mats were placed over these trees, otherwise they were exposed, and flowered and fruited in the open air. Lucy plucked a twig of orange blossom, and, holding it between her fingers lightly, looked into the flower. 'Beavis,' she said, 'I shall be picking these blossoms some time this year for the adornment of Grace. I had as soon be putting them about her in her coffin. You also would be happier that it were so.'

She did not look at her brother.

Though they were comparatively seldom together, she and her brother thought alike, felt alike, loved alike, as twins, each with the same disinterested and transparent love.

'No, Lucy,' answered Beavis, 'it is well as it is. The family must be saved, and no salvation is possible without sacrifice. The sacrifice the gods demand is always of the best and purest. They refused that of Saltcombe; it was great, but not great enough. Iphigenia must suffer that the wind may swell the slack sails again.'

'But the Duke will never consent.'

'He must consent. He will do so under protest to save the family; that is always the first consideration with him. He would cheerfully sacrifice himself, if called to do so, in such a cause.'

'Would it not be best that the sacrifice should be made by him—that the bulk of the property should be sold rather than that dear Grace herself should be forced into this most unsuitable connection?'

'I do not think she will be unhappy. Charles is amiable; he is not brilliant, and she will lead him.'

'I am sure she does not love him.'

'I am not sure that he loves her. He is struck with her, that is all. He cannot ask of her what he does not give himself.

'I hope,' said Lucy, warmly, 'with all my heart I do hope that it will never come off.'

'I see no other means of escape open. It must take place.'

Lucy was not happy. She took an opportunity of speaking alone to Charles Cheek.

'Mr. Cheek, you must excuse my temerity. I have been brought up with Lady Grace from childhood, and I care for her as my own soul. I do, do hope you love her.'

'Of course I do. But now,' said the young man, gravely, 'now that I have you all to myself, Cousin Lucy, you must be candid with me. I want particularly to know what are Lady Grace's feelings towards me.'

'She regards you very highly.'

'If the property could be saved without the incumbrance of Charles Cheek, I suppose she would be well content?'

'That is not a fair question to ask, and I will not answer it.'

'Cousin Lucy,' he said, 'I am like Jacob at the foot of the ladder whose top reaches into heaven, and Lady Grace is an angel standing on it, high, very high up. She beckons me to ascend, and I want her to come down to me. Till one yields there can be no *rapprochement*. Which is it to be?'

'How can you ask? For her to descend is inconceivable. You must go up.'

He shook his head. 'I do not care for such altitudes. The air is too thin, the light too strong, and it is deadly cold. I like the warmth of earth and its somewhat crass atmosphere.'

'You would drag her down!'

'Am I sacrilegious? I think her very perfect, quite angelic, but insufficiently human.'

'What do you mean by human—that which is gross? Lady Grace can never become that. Human she is in the best sense. She shows you what human nature may become, not what it usually is.'

'Quite so—*natura*, about-to-become. I like the present; there is unrest in a future participle. Cousin Lucy, to every substance, humanity not excepted, there are three conditions possible: the solid, the fluid, and the gaseous. I am in the first, she is in the last. I am not even, and have no desire to be, in the transition stage. She must condense and descend, or I must evaporate, and *that* I won't do.'

'Go higher, always higher!' said Lucy, eagerly.

'The desire to do so is not in me. It is a strain to me to

keep awing in this region of high culture. I am like Icarus. My waxen pinions are melting, and I shall go down suddenly.'

'Surely you do not object to culture.'

'Not at all. I like culture as it affects creature comforts. I would not go back a hundred years and be bereft of my bath, my daily paper, lucifer-matches, and having my hair brushed by machinery. Culture is excellent till it meddles with the inner man. When it begins to scrape, and reduce, and polish natural proclivities and robust individualities, why then, Lucy, I fancy it not.'

'You would like a luxurious savagery.'

'No, not that. Outer culture will relax and soften the inner brute. You begin by stifling nature and then mummifying it magnificently. Your highly crystallised culture resembles a Rupert's drop. Do you know it? It is a frozen tear of glass, so hard that you cannot break it with a hammer, and yet so fragile that it will crumble into dust between your fingers if you snip the hair-like end. Refine as you will, there is always a vulnerable point in your civilisation, and when that is touched the whole collapses. I like your culture well enough; a little of it is a wondrous thing; a great deal is overpowering. I have known a whole family suffocated by the breaking of a jar of otto of roses. You are passing human nature through retorts and sublimating it to an essence. There will be a reaction. The reaction is begun. It was the same in old Rome. Their culture was carried to an extremity, and the barbarian burst over it and trampled it out. Now your high refinement of mind and manner and spirit has reached its limit, and the great mass of barbarous, vulgar life beneath is lifting itself up, to smite you down and destroy you.'

'The northern barbarians came down on Rome because the old Roman civilisation was selfish. The northern races were full of heroic virtues, self-restraint, submission to authority, and religion. Are these qualities to be found in the coming barbarians?'

'Oh dear, no,' said Charles. 'What we are coming to is the revolt against these very virtues which characterise your Christian aristocratic culture. What is coming is the emancipation of individualism, which has been distorted and suppressed by self-restraint, submission, and religion. You, brought up under the old system, are parts of a whole, and think and act and breathe and move as portions of the social machine. You are bound with responsibilities, hedged about with duties.

You cannot do what you like, you have to consider everyone else. You have obligations to every child in the school and sick woman on her bed. You have to dress according to your station; attend church to set an example. Where is the I Myself in this? A poor bound lion in a net. The coming change is the bursting of the lion out of the net, and the rending of every mesh that entangled him; it is the rebellion of the individual against obligations of every sort, social, moral, political, religious. Self will be free and follow its own will wherever it leads—free to enjoy every luxury that civilisation can give, without scruple from within or check from without.'

Lucy shuddered.

Charles laughed. 'This frightens you, and well it may, brought up as you are in the old world. I do not say that your old world is wrong, or that the new world which is beginning to live is right. They are counter principles. I tell you what is coming; I need no prophetic instinct to see that. The individual for the first time since the fall of old Rome and heathenism is asserting itself. Hitherto the body corporate has been supreme.'

'That will be a terrible time. I dare not even think of it.'

'Not as bad as you suppose. In mechanics, when two forces meet, running in different directions, they do not kill each other, but they produce a resultant, that is, a force which goes in quite a new direction. The old idea is not exhausted, and when the new idea clashes against it, neither is neutralised so as to cease to be, both are modified and altered into a resultant of some sort. What the resultant will be when the counter forces in modern life meet, I cannot conjecture, but we shall see a new social departure in a direction of which we know nothing.'

'To return to Lady Grace.'

'You are right; to return to her. You see, I do not want to break away from the new current, to plunge myself in the old, which is passing away.'

'What prospect of happiness is there to either, with minds and principles so dissimilar, so conflicting?'

'That,' said he, and sighed, 'that is what I continually ask myself, and am as often frightened at the answer.'

'Oh, Cousin Charles! do not risk the ruin of her, of your life, by persevering.'

'Remember, Lucy, she encouraged me. She made the

advance, not I. I would not have dared to speak unprovoked by her.'

'Cousin Charles! you must release her.'

'What!—and ruin the family?'

Lucy put her hands over her eyes. 'I must not interfere,' she said; 'my thoughts were only for her.'

'This is how matters stand, Lucy,' said Charles Cheek. 'I love and venerate Lady Grace above every woman in the world, but she is not the woman I desire as my wife. I suppose I am deficient in ambition. It may be that she would insist on a higher life, a life of more restraint than that I now lead, and this I do not choose to adopt. I belong to the new era, and declare for liberty. I like comfort, I like enjoyment, and I detest obligation. If I marry Lady Grace I throw myself into moral, social, and mental bondage. No doubt it would do me good, make a high-principled, conscientious English gentleman of me; but I refuse the schooling, and the results are not to my taste. Lucy! I will give her up. I will go to my father and make the best terms I can for the family. It is *I* who shrink from the engagement, not she, and therefore we are bound to make some compensation.'

'Will you see her first?'

'No, I will write.'

Lucy drew a sigh of relief. 'I am sure your decision is right,' she said, 'cost what it may to the family.'

CHAPTER LIV.

A NEW LEAF.

Charles Cheek went up to town next day, reached Paddington at six P.M., and in twenty minutes was at his father's house. We regret the necessity, but it is unavoidable, for the fourth time we must introduce the reader to the elder Cheek at meals In fact the man was invisible at other times, except about the business of the Monokeratic establishment. This time, however, we see him not eating, but about to eat.

Charles acted on the present occasion with want of tact; he began on the subject uppermost in his mind before his father had eaten, whilst he was hungry and cross. Charles

had not dined, but he was young and independent of his meals, whereas an old man is not. Mr. Cheek's business was one that occupied his mind actively all day, and his nervous system became irritable towards evening. Mr. Gladstone was his ideal at 6 P.M., Sir Charles Dilke at 6.15, Chamberlain was hardly rancorous enough at 6.30, and Labouchere was the man for him at 6.45. At five minutes to seven he was furious against the Constitution, the Church, the House of Lords, his soap, hair-brushes, his cook, and the Royal Family. The old man was in his drawing-room, a room as tasteless as the dining-room. It reeked of Tottenham Court Road.

'It is all up,' said Charles.

'What is up? The glass or consols? Be explicit.'

'My engagement with Lady Grace Eveleigh.'

'Indeed—your engagement. Ugh! Thought they'd draw a score across that account. Who did it?'

'I—I released her. They are not to blame. I have written to say I will not hold her to her word.'

'You have, you—you Colorado beetle!'

'Yes, I have. I could endure the bondage no longer. I must have my clothes made for my back, not my back shaped to my clothes. I dare say the life of these aristocrats is very fine, and their ideas superfine, but I like a broad life and unchastened ideas. I have tried how I could get on among them, and I am tired of the experiment.'

'So that is settled?'

'Yes, it is. The scheme was yours. I have done my best to accommodate myself to it, but it is impracticable.'

'Impracticable. Do you know what you have done? You have danced about this young woman long enough to fool me into believing you were in earnest, and I have bought up several of their mortgages, which I would not have touched but for you.'

'Deal generously with the family, father,' said Charles. 'It is not their fault that the engagement is broken off. It is entirely my own doing.'

'That matters not,' said Mr. Cheek, roughly. 'I don't care for them, but I do care for my own money. I shall foreclose at once while the depression lasts. When land is up again, sell. That's business. I have a bill of sale on the contents of their houses. I'll release that pretty quick too.'

'Dinner is on the table, sir,' said the servant, entering.

'But, my dear father, I entreat you to consider that it is I

who wrong them, and that some reparation is due to them for the disappointment.'

'Do you hear?' roared the old man. 'Dinner is on the table!'

'Yes, but stay a moment, I entreat you.'

'What—let the fish get cold! Not for a score of Kingsbridges. Dinner is on the table. Go in!'

During dinner the old man scarcely spoke. He ate in a vindictive manner, as if he were hurting his son's feelings by each bite, and knew it, and delighted in doing it. When he cut the mutton he cut as though he were stabbing the offender; when he helped himself to gravy it was as though spooning up his blood; when taking potatoes and rice he dabbed the spoon into the vegetables as though stirring up and torturing his Charles's brain. When he drank he glowered over the rim of his glass at the young man. But he said nothing till the dessert was on the table and the servants withdrawn.

Then it was Charles who began.

'Father, I have a proposal to make which will surprise you. It is seriously made. I want you to put me in the way of earning my living.'

'Mr. Cheek set down a macaroon he was eating, and which was bitten in half, and stared at his son, then laughed insultingly.

'I am quite in earnest,' said the young man. 'Give me an opportunlty of working and earning as much as will support me. I ask of you nothing further. I desire henceforth to be beholden to no one, not even to you. I wish to be responsible for my actions to no one, to cut away the right of controlling and rebuking me which you have exercised so freely and so offensively. When I was living on an allowance from you, you then had some right over me; when I live on my own earnings, you will have none. I will allow none. When the money was given to me, I did not know its value; when I earn it by hard work, I shall know what it is worth. You have been rough of tongue with me, and I have felt it, without caring to amend my ways and deserve better; when I am free from it, I may find a motive for reform.'

He spoke frankly; his pleasant handsome face bore in it an expression new to it, a look of dignity it had never worn before. His hair was light, almost white in the gaslight, his eyes were blue, and as he spoke moisture gathered in them. His hand was on the table, playing with a raisin stalk,—a

white hand, well formed, that twitched and broke the stalk into many pieces, showing his nervous emotion.

Mr. Cheek said nothing, but stared open-eyed and open-mouthed.

'You do not understond me,' continued Charles, 'I allow that I have been a sorry fool. I am resolved to be so no longer. I should be a fool if I continued my pretence to the hand of Lady Grace, and mated out of my sort. I had an ambition once to be a soldier, and that you contradicted. Afterwards had none. You provided me with money, and I spent it. I had no aim, no motive to do otherwise. You urged me to this grand connection, and I went along the path you pointed out, partly to please you, partly because myself dazzled. But my eyes have been opened in time. I see that it is not a way I can walk on. I will choose another, humbler; I will work for my livelihood, and then I can spend my life as my ambitions spring up and direct.'

'You are in earnest?'

'So much in earnest that I refuse the four hundred pounds you have allowed me hitherto.'

'Refuse the allowance!'

'Yes. I will not touch what I have not earned, and so deprive you of the right to rebuke, and outrage me.'

'Outrage you!' echoed the father.

'Yes, outrage me,' said the young man. 'I have endured a great deal from you. I have borne it because you are my father; but every offensive word from you I have felt more keenly than you have supposed possible. It has not spurred me to do better, it has driven me to do worse. Now that is over. I will be my own master henceforth, responsible to no man, and enduring insult from none.'

'Mr. Cheek was still too amazed to speak. A dim consciousness that he had wronged his son awoke in his mind, but his mind was too coarse in texture to understand fully his fault. He was a rough man, who when out of humour used rough words. He meant them at the time, but he did not mean them to inflict mortal wounds. Education teaches man to measure his words, and check them as they pass from his heart over his tongue. Old Cheek had never had the education which imposes this self-restraint on speech. Charles had inherited from his mother a more sensitive nature than his father's; from boyhood he had been accustomed to hard words, and these had alienated him from the old man, who loved him whilst he abused him.

Charles was naturally weak, and his father's roughness had made him weaker. The old man had mortified his self-respect, till self-respect was almost dead within him. Now, suddenly, it had sprung to life and asserted itself.

Mr. Cheek stood up. He said nothing, and left the room. Charles saw no more of him that evening.

Next day, at breakfast (the fifth meal at which we have met him), he asked his son whether he still meant what he had said the night before, and when Charles insisted that he had spoken seriously, the father said, 'Charles, I recognise something good in this. It gratifies me. Begin to work for yourself. Learn the value of every sixpence. I will put you with Messrs. Newcomen and Bowcher, ship-agents in Wapping. They will take you to oblige me. I will see them and arrange about salary.'

'I ask nothing better.'

'And—accept from me fifty pounds to begin life upon. You must live in lodgings. But we see no more of each other till you have grown into this new condition of life. If you go into lodgings you must have some money.'

'I accept it, father,' said Charles, 'and,' he added with faltering voice, 'pardon me if I spoke too plain, and wounded you last night.'

'Wounded me! Not a bit. Words break no bones.'

CHAPTER LV

IN VAIN.

A MONTH had passed. Charles had not been seen by his father, who had fulfilled his undertaking, and had placed him with shipping agents, in a subordinate place. The old man had arranged with Messrs. Newcomen and Bowcher, who were ready to oblige him. Charles was to have plenty of work, and was to receive two pounds per week, of which, no doubt—though he did not know it—his father found a portion.

After the lapse of the month, Mr. Cheek, senior, visited the agents and inquired into the conduct of their new clerk. Messrs. Newcomen and Bowcher were glad to testify that, as far as they could judge, he was steady and attentive to his

work. He had been regular in his attendance, careful, obliging, and reliable.

Then Mr. Cheek made an excursion to Ebury Street, Pimlico, where his son lived in a boarding-house, kept by a Miss Jones. He chose a time for his visit when he knew his son would be at the office. Ebury Street, Pimlico, is a long way from Wapping, but Charles went to and fro by steamer from Vauxhall Bridge, and the air did him good.

Mr. Cheek found the dingy lodging-house kept by Miss Jones ; he rang the bell, and rapped sharply with the knocker, and the door was opened by Miss Jones herself, a thin lady with curls, a pasty face, and eyes so pale in their colour that they must have been washed and rewashed with soda till all the colour had been washed out of them. Miss Jones was full of amiability when Mr. Cheek introduced himself, and hastened to assure him of the respectability of her establishment, the high social standing of her guests, and the comforts they enjoyed. The house was admirably situated, away from the fogs ; and the health of the boarders was robust, as she could testify by their appetites. They breakfasted together, and she presided. She furnished them with coffee and tea, whichever they preferred. Some gentlemen were averse to tea in the morning, and they drank coffee. Others liked to change their drink week and week about. Each had an egg and a rasher of bacon, sometimes she substituted bloater for rasher. There was always a rack of toast on the table, as a pleasant change to bread and butter. When the gentlemen returned from their offices they had tea, and in the evening supper off cold meat, bread, and cheese, 'best American. I had Dutch cheese for some time, but I find the American is preferred by the gentlemen, so I have that now.'

She went on to assure Mr. Cheek that her lodgers were of the most select description. For many years she had among them an old Waterloo officer, but he was dead. The lady lodging on the first floor ought, if everyone had his rights, to be a baronet, but her aunt, from whom she had great expectations, had left everything to a female companion who had exercised great influence over her at the last. It was a pity, Miss Jones thought, that the lady had not gone to law and upset the will, and recovered the title and a real sealskin jacket which had gone to the companion, worth forty pounds. Another of her lodgers was a gentleman of some literary fame who at one time had earned five pounds by writing verses for Christmas cards.

Miss Jones went on to say that she charged for her lodgings a pound per week, exclusive of ale and washing, inclusive of a dinner on Sundays and Christmas Day.

Miss Jones did not provide the gentlemen with toilette soap, for she found them more fastidious in this particular than in their meat and drink. One liked glycerine, another oatmeal, and a third would use nothing but carbolic soap.

Mr. Cheek listened to Miss Jones without interrupting her, looking the faded woman through and through with his piercing eyes, taking stock of her. He was probably satisfied that, with a good deal of affectation, she was a worthy woman at core, for he gave a grunt, stood up, interrupted her flow of information, and begged to be conducted upstairs to his son's bedroom.

'Quite Alpine, I have been told,' said Miss Jones, as she conducted him to the very top of the house. 'The air at this altitude is keen, salubrious, and invigorating. The gentlemen all like the top storey, where they can see over the roofs. But, between ourselves, your son is my favourite, and I have accommodated him where he can have the finest view and the purest air. Yonder, sir, you can catch Doulton's Pottery Works; the effect, with the morning's sun on them, is very fine.'

Mr. Cheek looked round the little bedroom. It was in the roof, with a sloping ceiling. There was a fireplace, but the grate had not been used during Miss Jones's tenancy. The walls were hung with the cheapest of papers in two dingy colours. The furniture consisted of one chair, a chest of drawers with the mahogany veneering scaling away, a washhandstand of painted deal suffering from cutaneous disorder, and a bed, above which hung a photograph in a frame. Mr. Cheek knew the picture. A duplicate had been sent to him some time ago. Through the ring of the frame, with its head drooping over the picture, hung a withered lily of the valley.

Mr. Cheek came slowly down-stairs, holding the banisters with one hand and rubbing his nose with the other.

'Will this last?' he said to himself. 'What can be the meaning of it all? As for his taking offence at any words I may have said when annoyed, that's absurd—a mere excuse. Words are wind, and wind blows away.'

When he reached the parlour again, he said to the landlady, 'Look here, ma'am. I don't want you to tell my boy that I have been here to-day. Give him your best bedroom, not an

attic broom-and-pail cupboard. Turn out, if need be, the old woman who missed a baronetcy. I'll pay the difference. Give the boarders kidneys for breakfast now and then, and fowls for supper, or anything else they fancy. Cost, ma'am, is no object to me. I can't feed Charles differently from the rest, so they must all be well-fed together. No more of your American cheese; Stilton and Cheshire, and, if you will, Gorgonzola. Not a word about me. Take all the credit to yourself.'

Charles was able to get away early on Whitsun-eve. Monday would be a Bank holiday. He had been hard worked, and worked till late at night for some weeks, and Messrs. Newcomen and Bowcher put up their shutters on Friday night, and allowed their clerks holiday from the Saturday to the Tuesday morning. Charles took an early train on Saturday to Plymouth, and arrived at the Barbican the same afternoon. He went to the Golden Balls immediately, without stopping to have anything to eat. His heart was beating fast. His step was light, his eyes full of glad expectation, and he held his head up proudly. He was surprised to see that the house of Lazarus had been repainted. The shop was open. A good deal of business was done on a Saturday, double on the eve of a Bank holiday. People would pawn necessaries to obtain money for a day's pleasure.

He looked in at the window, and saw Joanna behind the counter talking to a woman who was in the shop with some article she wished to dispose of.

Charles waited till the woman came out, then he caught the door before she closed it, and stepped in.

Joanna, not hearing the door re-opened, did not suppose any one had entered. She did not see him, as she was engaged examining the article—a brooch, which she had taken.

Charles had a few moments in which to observe her. She was well, even handsomely dressed, but pale and worn. She put away the brooch, and seated herself; then she leaned her elbow on the counter, and put her hand to her brow, and drew a deep sigh.

'Joe!'

She sprang to her feet, and stepped back. He saw her turn deadly pale, and then lean both her hands on the counter to steady herself, as though afraid she would faint. She recovered herself, however, quickly, but her colour did not return as rapidly as her composure.

'Mr. Charles! You here?'

'Yes, dear Joe, I cannot help myself. I could not do otherwise than come. I have not had the chance before, and I have been hungering for the sight of your face, and for a word of encouragement from your lips. I came straight away by the morning train, and have just arrived. Why have you not answered my letters?'

'I sent you something.'

'Yes, a lily of the valley, but not a word accompanied it.'

'I sent you what I most valued, the first flower from the root Lady Grace gave me. I would not have parted with it to anyone else. I would not have picked it for myself, but—you have been kind to me, and—I thought I might never more have the chance of giving you anything.'

'Why did you not send me a word?'

Joanna made no answer. She looked down, her pallor remained, and she, who was usually so collected, stood trembling before him. She tried to disguise her agitation by shuffling her hands to and fro on the counter.

'Oh, Joe! you know that all is up between me and Lady Grace. We did not suit each other. We belonged to distinct worlds, she to the world that is passing away, I to the world that is coming on—though, I admit, but a poor specimen of that. Now that is all over, and I am free. I am changed from what I was. You knew me as an idler and a spendthrift, without aim and without energy. Now I am a clerk in a shipping office. I do not live on my father's bounty. I have refused his allowance. I live on what I earn. I work now for my daily bread.'

She looked up and smiled, but there was intense sadness in her face that showed through her smile like a shower through a rainbow.

'I get a hundred pounds a year, and I have fifty pounds per annum of my own, left me by my mother, independent of my father. May I take a chair, Joe?'

She nodded, and pointed to one. He drew it beside the counter, and seated himself; but she remained standing with her elbow on the desk, and her hand over her eyes, shading her face.

'I am lodging with an old lady in Ebury Street,' he went on, 'and pay her a pound a week. I do not dine there, but at an eating-house, and that costs me about nine shillings a week, add a shilling for extras, and that comes to twenty-six pounds in the year. I think I can clothe myself on ten pounds, so

that leaves just sixty-six pounds clear. I am to have my salary raised if I go on well. Now, Joe! Take away your hand, and let me see your face, let me look into your eyes. Will you give me the hope that you will come and be mine, and let us begin the world anew together? I will—I will work, and you shall never reproach me with idleness again. If I have you, I shall be happy; I shall care for nothing else. I shall do my work with a light heart, and sing over it, knowing that I am going home to *you*. You have done me a great deal of good already. You will make me do a great deal more hereafter, if you will consent to be with me always, to encourage me.'

He put up his hand to draw aside her arm from shading her face. Then he saw how great was her agitation. She was shaking like an aspen leaf, her face ash white, her eyes dim. She clasped her hands, and they quivered. She unclosed them, and put one to her brow, and put it down again, then laid her hand on her breast, and seemed to gasp for breath. She could not speak.

'Joe!' he said, 'why do you not answer me? It was for you that I refused my father's help, that I might have the right to choose whom I would, and I will have none but you. You have had a wretched life here. I have led a wasted life. You have taught me to break away from my past, and I would release you, in return, from yours. We shall begin the world together on very little, but love lightens every load and seasons every dish.'

Then she put both her hands outspread before her, and touched his breast, as he leaned forward, and thrust him away. Her eyes were dark in their sockets, and gleamed. 'I cannot—I cannot,' she said, quivering in voice, eyes, and lips, and every muscle of her body.

He looked at her in surprise. 'Why not, Joe? You must, indeed. If you take from me this hope, this ambition, I dare not say what will become of me. It is only my love for you which has lifted me to the threshold of a better life; now that you have led me to it, will you thrust me back into the folly and emptiness from which I have struggled up?'

'I cannot,' she said, slowly recovering herself. 'I signed you away for a hundred pounds. That is why I never answered your letters. That is why—now—now——' She could not speak. Something rose in her throat and choked her.

'Is that all?' exclaimed Charles. 'That was a joke.'

'No,' she answered, 'it was no joke to me. Your father was in earnest, so was I. And now it is too late—now——'

Then the door burst open, and Lazarus, in a black frock coat, rushed out of the inner part of the house.

'What! You here again? You dare to enter my premises. You scoundrel, you wastrel! Get out of my doors directly. Is it not enough that your father has snatched the Marquess from my grasp, but must you come here to carry off my wife also?'

'Stand back,' said Charles, thrusting the Jew away. 'I will not be touched by you. Wife! Joanna never shall be that if I can prevent it.'

'She is! Tell him, Joanna. Let him hear it from your own lips—make the news the sweeter, perhaps.'

Charles stood looking from one to another, petrified.

'Mr. Charles,' said the girl without looking at him, but with face averted, and playing a tune with her fingers on the counter to conceal her trembling, 'I told you it was to be so. This morning we went together before the registrar, and after sundown the cohen will be here to marry us by Jewish rites.'

'You coward! you vile Jewish coward!' cried Charles, losing all control over himself, and seizing Lazarus by the collar and shaking him. 'You have taken a despicable advantage over this poor girl, to make her life ten thousand times more wretched than it was before.'

As he shook the Jew his blood heated, then boiled; and, blind to what he was about, stung by disappointed love, jealousy, disgust, flaring into inconsiderate rage, he took up one of the many sticks that were exposed in the shop for sale, and, holding Lazarus by the collar, swung him from side to side, beating him fast and hard. Lazarus screamed for help. He was not much hurt; he writhed so that the blows fell on his new black frock coat, but now and then a cut caught him across the legs. A woman—Mrs. Thresher—who had been in the kitchen, hearing the shrieks, ran in, and then rushed forth into the street crying 'Murder!'

Charles was excited to madness at the tossings, and screaming, and dodging of the Jew, at his want of success in hurting him.

His arm relaxed at length; he was exhausted, and he cast the wretched man away.

'There!' said he; 'remember Charles Cheek in connection with your wedding-day.'

Next moment he was in the hands of the police, summoned by Mrs. Thresher.

'I give him in charge!' shouted the Jew. 'He has half-murdered me in my own house! Take him off to the lock-up!'

So it came about that Charles Cheek spent his Whitsun holidays in confinement.

CHAPTER LVI.

PREPARATORY.

For some weeks Lazarus had been in a bad temper, not at all in a lover's genial mood. His mortgages had been taken up by Mr. Cheek and his bills met; his power over the Ducal family was ended. Disappointed revenge and frustrated ambition had combined to make him irritable. He was now in possession of a very large sum of money—of the whole of his savings through many years of privation and work, and he did not know what to do with it. He did not, of course, keep the money in the house; it was lodged with his banker. The question that recurred to him again and again was, How should he invest it? The ferment in his mind was a relief to Joanna. It saved her from annoyance. He almost forgot he was a lover in his anxiety about his money.

When they sat together over the kitchen fire, his talk was of the condition of the money market, on promising investments, on the rise and fall of various stock which had attracted his interest; or he spoke fretfully of the selfishness of Cheek senior in coming to the assistance of the Kingsbridge family. At one time Cheek was an idiot, throwing away his money on coroneted fools; at another he was deep and selfish, robbing him, Lazarus, of the fruits of his labours, just as they were ripe for picking.

'I know what he'll do,' grumbled Lazarus. He'll puff Bigbury as he puffed his Monokeratic system, run up a hotel, build a town and call it Cheekville. Then his son Charles will marry well, become M.P., then Baronet, and so the unicorn will poke its way into respectability.

But though Lazarus was not an ardent lover, he did not lose sight of the proposed change in his relation to Joanna.

'My dear, he said, 'I've got a book of etiquette written by a lady of rank among the lots here, and I've read it. I learn from it that in good society it is not thought the *chic* for us to be married from the same house. So I've spoken to Mrs. Thresher—a very motherly body, though her line is ham and sausage—and she will take you in; she has a spare room on the second floor, where you can reside till our nuptials. I hope you will find nothing to complain of in the marriage agreement which I have instructed Crudge to draw up and bring with him the day before our wedding. I have made over everything to you, because I really do not think I have a relative near enough for me to know him. With us of the seed of Israel, Joanna, maidens are always married on a Wednesday, and widows on a Friday; but, as you are not one of us it really does not matter what day is chosen, so I have fixed on Whitsun-eve as suitable, then the honeymoon can coincide with the Bank holiday, when excursion trips are cheap. With us, the marriage agreement is called the kynos, and is made on a Sunday, but, as you don't belong to the house of Israel, any day will do for that; and I've told Crudge to be here on the Friday. Then, on the Sabbath we'll walk over together to the registrar, as you're a Christian; and after sundown, when the Sabbath is over, and the Sunday begins, a cohen will come from Bristol and will marry us by religious ceremonial, as is customary among us. What a fortunate thing it is, Joanna, that I kept the howdah all these years. At last it will come in serviceable; for in our marriage ceremony the bridegroom and the bride stand under a canopy of silk or some precious stuff, and the cohen blesses them, and takes a ring from me and puts it on your finger, whilst I say, "Verily thou art espoused unto me, according to the rites of Moses and Israel." After that a gobletful of red wine is handed to the cohen, and he blesses it, just puts his lips to it, and passes it to us. We shall have to empty it between us, and then I dash the goblet on the ground and break it, by way of putting you in mind that you are but brittle ware.' Lazarus shook his head. 'Ah, Joanna! what are ceremonies without a moral meaning?'

'Is that all?'

'Yes, that is all. Now, although you must sleep and have your meals at Mrs. Thresher's, I don't see that you need neglect the shop. I shall be very much engaged, as the three rooms upstairs have to be cleared, and a new range put in the kitchen. Talking of ranges,' said Mr. Lazarus, rubbing his chin in his

palm, 'they are difficult things, what with their dampers and traps. They are like organs, only to be played upon by one who understands the stops. And where will you find a cook who understands a range? When she wants to bake she pulls out both the dampers, one of which is designed to draw the fire away from the oven to the boiler; and when she wants to boil, she pulls out both dampers, one of which is designed to draw away the fire from the boiler. And when she wants neither to bake nor to boil, she pulls out both dampers, and carries the fire up the chimney, which is just the same as if an organist pulled out stop diapason and hautboy when he wanted pianissimo; and tremolo and dulciano when he wanted forte; and diapason, hautboy, tremolo and dulciano when he wanted nothing in particular. Come here, Joanna.' He made her follow into his sanctum. 'We must have a clearance here. It is a loss, but it cannot be helped. Do you see all those shelves full of chemist's drugs? I took the lot once for a bad debt, but I've never been able to sell them. Ipecacuanha, cod-liver and castor oils, extract of senna, mercurial ointment, tincture of taraxacum, arnica, laudanum. There is enough there to dose the Barbican.'

'What, am I to throw them all away?'

'Yes, unless you can dispose of them better. And you can sell the bottles.'

'I shall find a use for some,' said Joanna.

CHAPTER LVII.

RELEASE.

'Mr. Lazarus,' said Joanna.

'Call me Emmanuel, or, for short, Em.'

'Mr. Lazarus,' said Joanna, disregarding the interruption, 'you will not proceed against Mr. Cheek.'

'Why not? Show me the reason. Didn't he shake me, and slap me, and bang me, and beat me with a stick? Didn't he burst the buttons off me, and nigh upon throttle me with my cravat? And didn't he tumble my teeth out and break the laces of my stays? Am I to sit down under all these provocations and bear them like a lamb?'

'I entreat you to pass this over. Do not appear against him.'

'No, no, Joanna. Do not try this on too soon. We are not wed yet, and when we are, you will have to learn that wedlock does not make a missus of you over me. Mistress of the house, of the pots and pans, and the servant if we have one—though I dare say we can manage if Mrs. Thresher will come in charing—mistress over Mrs. Thresher if you like, but not over me. Do you know that every day I say the Berochos shel shachrit, and bless Providence that I am not born a Gentile, born a slave, and born a woman. Among you Christians the order of the domestic world is inverted, and the woman dominates over man and beast. It is not so with us. The Parsees have a very good custom. Every morning the wife falls down before her husband's feet and worships him. Even we Jews have not attained to such a pitch of enlightenment as that. In the Aisher-Yotsar every day we thank Providence for having made openings in us, eyes wherewith to see, ears wherewith to hear, nostrils wherewith to smell, doors these for the acquisition of information, and we pray that they may ever be kept open; and now, through these same doors to-day imbibe the lesson that, in this house, I remain master. In whatsoever capacity you be, whether as maid-of-all-work, or as pawn, or as wife, I remain above you, as the sun is above the earth. Your orbit is about me, not mine round you.'

Preparations had been made in the house for the change in the condition of the two usual inmates. Three upper rooms had been completely cleared of their contents, and they had been adapted for habitation. That commanding the street, immediately over the shop, was to be the drawing-room, another was furnished as the dining-room. In one way or another Lazarus disposed of a great deal of rubbish. He groaned over it, because he was losing money. 'This sofa,' said he, 'must go for twelve and three, and the cabinet for fifteen and nine. If I bided my time I might dispose of the sofa for two guineas, and the cabinet for fifty shillings, but let this loss of three pound four—say three guineas—be an evidence to my Joanna of the love and self-sacrifice lodged in this bosom. Love may well be described as a devouring flame; it consumes a lot of capital.'

The beds, the tables, chairs, wardrobes, uniforms, crockery, were disposed of, and space made for the painters and paperers to get to work. The staircase was put to rights, the floors relaid.

'Though why the floors should be made pretty, when they will be covered by carpets, is more than I can see.'

On Saturday morning the Jew and Joanna, with Mrs. Thresher and her husband, appeared before the registrar the two latter as witnesses.

'If I was to die intestate, and without a family,' said Lazarus, 'half of all I'm possessed of would go to the widow, and the other half to the next of kin, and it would take something to find a kinsman. But now I have made you to take all, Joanna, by my marriage settlement, which Crudge brought here yesterday for signature. Which is another proof—if proof were wanting—how fond I am of you. Joanna, when I come to consider all I've done for you, how I have lifted you out of the dirt, so to speak, to make you my consort, and how I have scattered the contents of the three upper rooms, and how I have made liberal provision for you should you survive me—I say that, considering all this, I think there should be no bounds to your gratitude and devotion to me.'

The upper room, intended as dining-room, was prepared for the occasion of the religious ceremonial. In the middle hung a brass lamp of seven nozzles, the Sabbatical lamp, with seven wicks, which were all burning. The howdah, raised on four poles, a richly decorated canopy of red silk embroidered with gold thread, rested against the wall; on an ormolu marble-topped side table stood a large crystal goblet filled with purple wine. The day was not quite set, but the blinds were drawn that the inquisitive people of the marine store opposite, who were well aware what was about to take place, and whose windows commanded the room, might be debarred participation in the ceremony. Directly the sun set, and the Sabbath was over, the Rabbi would arrive, together with some Plymouth Jews and Jewesses, invited to be present. For the occasion, Mrs. Thresher presided in the kitchen.

Lazarus was in high excitement. He had eaten nothing all day, as a Jew is required to fast on his wedding day. He was restless. He ran about the house to assure himself that all was in readiness. As the Saturday before a Bank holiday was one in which much business was done, he had sent Joanna into the shop. The opportunity of making something was not to be neglected. It took him some time to put himself to rights after the thrashing he had received from Charles Cheek. His shirt and his new cloth clothes, and his glossy dyed hair were all ruffled, but his temper was more ruffled than they, less

easily smoothed. It was unreasonable of Joanna to ask him to forgive Charles. Who is disposed to forgive injuries on an empty stomach? Lazarus was heated, fretted, fuming, his cunning eyes sparkling with feverish light.

A small room on the ground floor had been cleared for Joanna as a place in which she could sit instead of occupying the kitchen. Hitherto it had been filled with goods. It was rather bare of furniture, and was uncarpeted, but then, as Lazarus said, why launch out into extravagance over a room no one would be received into?

The sun had set. Joanna was seated in this room. The shutters had been put up in the shop. There was twilight at this time of the year, and the girl sat in the window looking out into the street, in the twilight. The guests were arriving; the ladies in their richest dresses—handsome young Jewesses with splendid eyes, and elderly Jewesses gross and coarse; Jews in evening suits under their overcoats, with white ties, and white kid gloves, and waistcoats festooned with chains. The cohen had come, and had been received with respect.

Joanna would not appear till the last moment. She heard the trampling of the feet in the passage, Mrs. Thresher's voice as she divested the ladies of their wraps. She heard the feet go up the steep stairs, and then the buzz of the voices overhead.

Polly Thresher was there, the daughter of the ham shop, a young lady who was barmaid at an inn, but who had come for the occasion to help. Polly was not an old bird, she fed on chaff; she gave chaff also. She was thought to be pretty, and assumed the airs of a beauty—a forward, fast young lady, accustomed to the society of the gentlemen who hang about a bar. She and a young Jewess were to be Joanna's bridesmaids, and lead her to the dining-room and the howdah, when all were arrived and ready for the performance of the ceremony.

Joanna sat by the window, looking wistfully into the street, without looking at anything in particular. She had her hands in her lap, folded. A hard despairing expression was on her face.

Miss Thresher put her head in. 'Oh my! not got your veil on, miss? The gents and ladies is nigh all assembled, also the minister, with a long beard.'

'Polly,' said Joanna, 'do me a favour. Ask Mr. Lazarus to come down.'

The good-natured girl nodded, and ran up-stairs. A moment after the usurer entered the room.

'Heigh, Joanna,' he said; 'looking beautiful in that dress; wanting in colour rather. I wish I could persuade you to use a little rouge de théâtre. There is a make-up box in that cupboard. One always reads of a "blushing bride," and you look as though you had dusted your face over with blanc de perle. Put on diamonds. Don't shrink. The ladies upstairs have piled on all the jewelry they could borrow, and I don't want you to fall short. I've not made as much show hitherto as others, but I've made more money than any man in the room up-stairs.'

'Mr. Lazarus,' she said, 'I have sent for you once more to entreat you not to appear against Mr. Charles Cheek. He has just turned over a new leaf, has left his father and entered an office—he is with shipping agents—and he lives on what he earns. Let him go quietly back on Monday. Do not stand in his way. I ask you this as a personal favour. I have not asked you many favours. This shall be my last. Will you grant it me?

'No, Joanna, most certainly not. It is of no use your interceding with me for that scapegrace. It is a principle with me that no one shall touch me without suffering for it, and I am sure you would not have me go against principle.'

'I implore you, let him go! I will ask you on my knees.'

'No,' answered the Jew, 'I will not. Not now, and never.'

Then he left.

'In five minutes we shall expect you,' he said, in the door. 'Miss Phillips will come down for you.'

She remained seated. Her lips moved. She plucked a little bunch of lily of the valley from her bosom, looked at it, kissed it, and replaced it. Then she folded her hands again, and remained motionless.

People passed in the street. Boys romped, women scolded. A cart went by laden with fish, then a wheelbarrow with whiting. Some sailors, half tipsy, drifted past, singing, squabbling. The lamplighter came to turn the gas and ignite it. She watched him, bending forward to observe how often he missed the tap. She put her hand to her brow; it was burning, but her hands and feet were like ice. She was in white silk, and beside her, over a chair, hung a rich lace veil.

Seven years ago, on that very day, her mother had brought her to the Golden Balls. Every circumstance came back upon

her memory with vivid distinctness. Seven years of slavery, leading now to what was worse a hundred times.

'Fool that I was,' she muttered, 'to climb out of the water. Better have choked in that slime than have come to this. I have lived in hope, and now hope is dead. My mother has died, I know not when and I know not where, and I was not by her to close her eyes and receive her last kiss.

Then she heard a tap at the door.

She stood up and threw the veil over her head.

'Are you ready?' asked Miss Polly Thresher and Miss Phillips, standing in the doorway. 'Everyone is ready, and expecting you.'

She turned once more with a face that darkened as though a fold of the coming night had dropped over it, towards the window, irresolute, unwilling to go.

At that moment she heard a voice, and her heart stood still. The voice was in the street and the tones were familiar.

'Here, lass! Thou'lt find t' bairn right enough.'

Joanna uttered a piercing cry, and dashed through the door, driving the two girls standing in it to right and left. In another moment she was in the street, laughing, crying, clasping a poor woman, whilst a burly skipper stood by, with his hands in his pockets, and chuckled.

'Mother! mother!' she cried, 'I knew you would come. I was sure you would not desert me. Only just at the last my trust gave way. Now all is well! Oh, so well! mother! mother!'

The woman she clung to was indeed the same poor creature whom we saw in the first chapter of the story throw herself and the child into Sutton Pool.

She was thin, oldened, haggard, with grey in her hair, and a wandering look in her eyes, but the face was the same. Joanna knew her instantly. Her heart leaped towards her with a spasm of mingled joy and pain. The poor woman seemed quite as poor as when she tried to drown herself seven years before. She did not seem to have gained much more courage to battle with the hardships of life during these years.

Joanna drew her into the house, thrust the two young women impatiently, angrily, away, brought her mother into her own room, and then shut and locked and bolted the door against intruders.

Hastily she placed her mother in the chair she had recently occupied, and held her, looked into her worn face, then

covered it with kisses and tears ; clasped the hands, rough, soiled, wrinkled, and bathed them with tears, and dried them with her burning lips. Then she held the hands to her beating heart as though their pressure would lull its tumult.

'Oh, mother ! my own, my own, my dearest mother !'

She could say no more, only repeat these words again and again, and intercept them with fresh transports. Then she cast herself on her knees and threw one arm about her mother's waist and the other round her neck, and laid her own hot cheek and burning head against the bosom on which they had rested so often, and where they had found comfort in olden times.

'Oh, mother ! my sweet mother !' she repeated, and laughed, and wiped her tears away against the poor woman's breast. 'Oh, my mother ! my mother ! God be praised ! God be praised !'—and that was the first time Joanna had ever raised her heart to one above. Her joy was so great that it gave her soul wings for the moment, and carried her, unconsciously, on high.

When she became a little calmer she slightly relaxed her hold that she might look at her mother's face attentively, by the light of the street lamp.

'Why, my child,' said the poor woman, 'what is this ? Why are you dressed in this fashion ? Are you going to be married ?'

At the same moment the girls outside tapped loudly, and Polly Thresher called through the door—

'They be all waiting, and Mr. Lazarus has sent down to know why you are not come up. Please be quick, miss !'

'Mother !' exclaimed Joanna, 'help me !'

She threw off the veil, and tore off the white silk dress and everything she had on wherewith she had been adorned for the marriage, and eagerly, with hasty fingers, put on her old stuff dress, patched and darned, and her house slippers.

'I am coming,' she said triumphantly to those without. 'Tell them I am ready.'

Then she threw open the door, ran into the shop, took the ledger from the desk, and catching her mother by the hand, drew her with her up the stairs into the room, where a gaily dressed and glittering party were assembled—a room brilliantly lighted—and, drawing her mother after her, pressed forward, and threw the ledger on the table.

'Lazarus !' she cried, with exultation in her voice. 'My

mother has come, and brought the money and the duplicate. Score me out! I am no longer Six-hundred-and-seventeen. I am free.'

CHAPTER LVIII.

THE LAST OF THE EMS WATER.

JOANNA was resolute. It was in vain that those present represented to her that she had been with Lazarus to the registrar's office, so that in the eye of the law she was already married. She refused peremptorily, absolutely, to go through the religious ceremony. She was triumphant, defiant. Her eyes were sparkling, her cheeks kindled. No necessity now for the make-up box and rouge de théâtre.

'I wouldn't be drowned, I said, this day seven years, and I won't be wedded now,' she said.

Everyone spoke at once. The cohen addressed her seriously; Mrs. Thresher, who came up, overwhelmed her with reproaches. Lazarus stormed and screamed with rage, and insisted on her obedience to his wishes. But the time for submission was past. As long as he was her master she had served him, in cold and hunger and rags. She had begged for him, bargained for him, fought for him. She had nursed him in sickness, she had guarded his goods like a watch-dog. She never had defrauded him of a penny. Now that she was free she would not be his wife.

She paid no attention to those present; their voices sounded in her ears, but she did not hear their words; she saw the persons that surrounded her as figures in a dream. One face alone was distinct before her—her mother's, one voice alone entered her ears and reached her brain—her mother's. Her soul was like a long-closed room, into which no light has entered; suddenly the shutters are thrown back, and the window flung open, and the whole chamber is full of summer sweetness and sunny splendour. Her step was elastic, flame leaped through her pulses and flashed in her eyes. She had recovered her mother, the only person in the world to whom she belonged, who belonged to her, the mother on whose lap she had lain, in whose arms she had been rocked, against whose heart she had cried herself to sleep, the mother who was the

truest, most unchangeable of friends, the best of refuges in sorrow, the surest of counsellors,—she had everything now—everything of which she had been deprived for seven years.

Heedless of every circumstance, deaf to every argument, blind to every advantage, she drew her mother away. She wanted to be alone with her again, to hear her story and to tell her own, to sweep her away again in the flood of her overflowing love. She held her hand so fast that not for a moment could the poor woman disengage herself. Mrs. Rosevere was bewildered. She understood nothing of what went on about her, the lighted room, with the gentlemen in evening dresses, the ladies glittering with jewelry, the crimson canopy, the seven-flamed lamp, her daughter's strange demeanour. She was a timid woman with a mazed mind at the best of times; and this sudden episode completely distracted her.

Joanna brought her mother back into the room below, and fastened the door, but Lazarus had followed and was kicking and hammering at it with his fists, and swearing that he would have her out. He would not be insulted thus before all his guests.

Joanna remained quietly in her chair, clinging to her mother. There was disturbance outside. Voices speaking in the passage to Lazarus, he answering in shrill tones, in accents of passion; the trampling of feet and the slamming of the house-door, and after awhile, stillness. The guests had withdrawn to laugh with each other outside the house, on their way home; Polly was with her mother in the kitchen, uttering exclamations of amazement and disgust.

When all was quiet, and the fear of being disturbed had passed away, then Joanna said, 'And now, my darling mother, tell me all that you have done and gone through during these seven years—and tell me why you did not come to release me earlier.'

Then the poor faded woman narrated a long story of troubles, beginning with her sickness on board Mr. Hull's boat, and how she had been taken to a hospital, and got better, and been discharged, and had gone into service and earned some money, which had been dissipated by a return of sickness. A story of recurrent toil and disappointment, of saving and scattering, of hope and despair. Joanna sat by her, holding her hands and pressing them, and when she heard how her mother had toiled she kissed her hands, and when she heard how she had been sick she flung her arms about her and swayed her, and sobbed and fondled her. Mrs. Rosevere went

on to tell how that at last she had been able to gather together a little money, and how she had gone to Goole and had waited there, taking odd jobs of work, till she could find a boat which was going with coals to Plymouth, for she could not afford the railway journey ; and how at last she had found Mr. Hull loading to go there—and how now, at length, she was back in Plymouth. The story took a long time in telling, for the poor woman was a rambling talker, who lost her thread and went on without it, and then picked it up at the wrong place and generally entangled it ; but Joanna was not critical, she made out all she wanted to know, that the mother's heart had yearned through seven years for the child, as the child's heart had yearned seven years for the mother.

A rough tap at the door, and Mrs. Thresher's voice.

Joanna went to the door and unlocked.

'We can't remain here all night, you know,' said the old woman roughly, even rudely. 'We've got our own duties to fulfil—and a mussy it is some folks are found in the world who do their duties. Polly has to go back to the "Coach and Horses," and I've got my swearing old Radical husband to attend to. So we are off.'

'Very well,' said Joanna, 'you can go.'

'And I hope somebody will be ashamed of herself, and of giving people a lot o' trouble for nothing, and of her ingratitude to the best of masters, and——' Joanna slammed the door in her face. This did not interrupt or put a stop to Mrs. Thresher's grumblings. She grumbled as she got into her bonnet, grumbled herself out of the house, and grumbled all the way along the Barbican to her own home, where her grumbling was drowned by the louder, more boisterous political grumbling of Mr. Thresher.

Joanna sat stroking her mother's hair till Mrs. Thresher was out of the house, and then she began to tell her mother her own story.

She told the story with perfect frankness. She hid nothing from her. She told her about Charles Cheek, and the necklace, and the pink silk dress ; she told her about Court Royal, and described to her Lady Grace ; she told her of how she had been caught, and was obliged to run away ; she told her of the subscription ball, and then she told her how Charles had been there that day, had beaten Lazarus, and was now in the lock-up till Lazarus should appear against him. She told her mother also how that she had been about to be married to Lazarus,

when, in the nick of time, she—her dear mother—had arrived to release her. Then she was silent for a few moments, holding her mother's hand between both of hers, and hers twitched with nervousness. 'Mother,' she said, then hesitated; 'mother—hush! does no one hear?' She listened. The house was still. She did not hear the tread of Lazarus upstairs. Nevertheless she was not satisfied; she went to the door, opened it, looked along the passage, then returned, took her mother's hand again between her own, and said, 'Mother—I had made up my mind. I never could, I never would, be his. I would not have lived.'

'What do you mean, dear?'

'I should have destroyed myself.'

'Oh, Joanna! Joanna!' The poor woman shrank back.

'Mother, when you were in your deepest despair, and you saw no light before you, you threw yourself into the water. I was driven to the last point of endurance. I could not, I would not, endure to be his wife. It would have destroyed all my self-respect. I thought how I could escape, and I saw no other way but this.'

The woman shuddered. 'I did wrong, my child, very wrong; the Lord forgive me, a poor sinner. I was as one mad at the time.'

'I was not mad,' said Joanna, 'but in my soberest sense. I would never, never be his—I would die first; that was the only way of escape that I could think of. Mr. Lazarus is not a bad man altogether, and I have a kind of regard for him, he has his good points; but I cannot, and I will not endure him as a husband. Can you understand me, mother? A horror and loathing came on me—and, just as you came by, I was looking out of the window to say good-bye to the daylight which I thought I should never see again.'

'It was very, very wrong,' whispered the mother.

'I can't see that. I have two consciences, one pawnbroking, the other womanly. The first had no opinion about it, the the other was very positive it was what I ought to do.'

'But how—oh, Joanna!' The poor woman shuddered.

'I had made my plans. Lazarus had told me to clear away a number of bottles of drugs and chemicals from his room. Among them was a stoppered phial of laudanum, and Charles had told me about that. It gives no pain when taken, but sends you to sleep, and you sleep peacefully away into the endless sleep.'

The mother, shivering and white, held Joanna away from her.

'What else could I do? Whither could I go? I had no one to whom I belonged and with whom I could find a home. I could not remain in this house with him any more as his servant after he had wanted to make me his wife, and his wife I would not be.'

Her mother was trembling as with cold—as she trembled on that same day seven years before when she stood in the same house, though not in the same room, and when she was drenched with sea-water.

'You may say—There was Mr. Charles Cheek. But, mother, his visit came too late. I had been already to the register office with Mr. Lazarus. It is true he had written to me two or three times, to tell me what he was about, but he had not said a word in those letters about wanting me to be his wife. And, even if he had, I must have refused him, because I gave him up to his father for a hundred pounds. Now, mother, would it have been honourable in me to take that money, and afterwards go from my agreement to which I had signed my name? No, I could not, much as I like Charles—and I do, I do like him. I could take him as little as I could Mr. Lazarus. I have a conscience. I have two—they may be queer to the fancy of some folk, but they are plain and outspoken to me, and what they say, that I do, and no haggling and bargaining and beating down with them. So you see, mother, there was no help for it. I thought, when I made my plan, that if I took all the laudanum myself, master would find it out and fetch a doctor, and they would bring me round, so I was resolved to give him some of the laudanum also, enough to——'

'Oh, Joanna!' in a tone of agony and horror; 'not to kill him also?'

'No, mother, I had no thought of that. That would be murder, and no provocation would bring me to that. No. I thought if he should swallow enough to make him confused, and unable to understand what had taken me, that he would be as one drunk, and sleep, and wake when I was past recovery.'

Mrs. Rosevere wrung her hands, uttered a faint cry, and slipped out of the chair upon her knees, and, pressing her hands to her bosom, said, 'My God! my God! I thank Thee that Thou didst bring me here in time to save the soul of my poor child.'

Joanna waited till her mother had recovered herself some-

what before she proceeded with her narrative. She drew her back upon the seat, and took her hand again between her own. Her face was earnest and pale now ; it had lost its light and colour.

'Mother, the Jews have a ceremony at their weddings of filling a large glass with red wine, and the bridegroom sips this, then passes it to the bride, who also sips it. Then he finishes it, and when it is empty he dashes it to fragments on the ground. I had to prepare everything upstairs, and I poured the laudanum into the goblet, and mixed it well with the wine. Then I purposed, when it came to me to sip, to take a long deep draught, leaving only just enough for Lazarus to suit my purpose. None would suspect what I had done. I would go away to my little attic-room and lock the door, and lay me down on the bed and never wake again, and that would have been the end of my story, mother, had not you arrived at the proper moment, and for a second time given me life.'

'Joanna,' said Mrs. Rosevere, 'this is very terrible, and I cannot bear to think of it. God forgive me that I ever showed you a way out of misery. The Lord interfered then to save me from myself; and the Lord has interfered now to save you. Now, Joanna, to my thinking, there is no time to be lost, we must go upstairs at once and throw away the poison. It must not be left exposed another minute.'

'Yes, mother,' said the girl, 'you are right. It is the last duty I have to do in this house, and it shall be done forthwith. After that we will go out and leave it, never to set foot over its threshold again.'

They ascended the stairs together. The door was shut. Joanna knocked. She received no answer.

'Perhaps Mr. Lazarus has gone out,' whispered her mother. 'If so, we must not leave the house till his return.'

Joanna opened the door into the newly furnished dining-room. The apartment would have been dark but for the flicker of the seven-wicked Sabbatical lamp. Lazarus, governed always by the idea of economy, had extinguished the candles. The lamp-wicks burned badly, and the light was lurid.

Joanna and her mother stood in the doorway looking round. All at once the woman uttered a piercing cry, and staggered back. Joanna at the same moment started forward.

On the floor, under the red silk gold-embroidered canopy, lay Lazarus, as one dead, holding the empty goblet in his hand.

The girl raised him on her knee, tore off his cravat, and lifted his head on her bosom. He was breathing heavily. Mrs. Rosevere dashed water in his face.

'He must be made to stand,' said the woman. 'He must be kept on his feet, walking all night. He must be forced to keep awake.'

'Oh, mother, he has been fasting since yesterday at sunset, and he has taken this on an empty stomach. Hold him, mother, hold him whilst I run. I know what to give him. That was not sold—that will save him—the rest of the Ems water.'

CHAPTER LIX.

WITHOUT A WATCH-DOG.

Mrs. Rosevere and her daughter had an anxious night with Lazarus. They were afraid to send for a doctor, lest he should discover what had been done. They walked the Jew about, and forced him to drink Ems water, and did not venture to leave him till morning, when they put him to bed in his old room downstairs.

He was obliged to remain in bed next day, and Joanna and her mother attended him. He was surly, and snarled at them. He could not forgive Joanna. He received her attentions with resentment. He was ignorant of the cause of his illness. He supposed that he had had a fit.

As he got better he occupied himself in bed whittling a stick. On Monday, after he had eaten a chop and drunk a bowl of soup made for him by Joanna, and brought him by Mrs. Rosevere, he suddenly leaped out of bed armed with his stick, and chased the woman from his room, then rushed after her into the kitchen, where he fell upon Joanna, full of malice and fury, swore and cursed and threatened, and struck her over the head with the stick. 'Get out of this place. Never show your face in it again, you ungrateful minx. Eating me out of house and home. Oh, yes! Chops and soup! You can't stint yourselves when I am ill and unable to look after you.' Then he drove them out of his house.

As soon as they were gone he bolted and barred the door. He had refused to allow Joanna to take anything away which

the girl might claim as her own. She had pleaded for nothing but the pot of lily of the valley, and that he refused.

When Lazarus had thrust Joanna forth, he returned to his room to dress. He trembled with anger, anger that had been simmering in his mind since Sunday morning, but which he had kept in control till he was strong enough to give it vent.

'I am well rid of her,' he said, laying aside his stick. 'Blighted be the day that I took her in. This is the gratitude I receive for having nurtured her in my bosom, a viper that turns and stings me. What is the world coming to? Where is morality left? Here is this girl that I have cared for, and instructed, and fed, and given my society to, turns my head, puts me to frightful expense, makes me sell off a lot of capital furniture at half its value, and involves me in bills to tradesmen for painting and papering, and carpentering and plumbing, turns the whole house upside down, and in the end—flouts me in the face of my own people, makes me ridiculous. Well said the Rabbi Nathan that Manoah was a fool, because it is written in the Book of Judges, "He followed his wife." For whoever runs after a woman takes leave of his senses.'

Lazarus wandered about his house looking at the changes that had been made in it, and groaning. The bills of the tradesmen had not come in. He would have to pay them. He climbed the stairs to Joanna's attic-room, and found a malicious pleasure in flinging her pots of flowers out of the window on the stones of the quay or into the water, hoping that she might be near to see and bewail the destruction of her cherished possessions. He found the photograph of herself and Charles Cheek. He had not seen it before.

'That's the way my money went! Oh, if I could but find a case on which to prosecute her!' He tore the picture to pieces and flung it into the street.

There was nothing else in the room that Joanna could have called her own, on which he might vent his spite. He crept downstairs again. His legs were not firm under him, the laudanum or the Ems water had weakened him, and they shook.

'I'll have Mrs. Thresher to look in on me every day, I will. She is a sensible woman, and took Joanna's conduct to heart. I'll get her to let Polly come and mind the shop. She's a sharp girl, and if I promise to deal handsomely by her, perhaps she'll give up the bar and take to the counter. I'll let that scorpion know that I can do without her.'

He wondered at himself, as he stood in the carpeted and furnished rooms, for having been induced to change his old mode of life. His object for many years had been to revenge himself on the Marquess. For that he had stinted himself; and when his opportunity was taken from him he had been unsettled, without an object for which to work and deny himself. Man must have some aim; when one is taken from him he finds another. When revenge was disappointed, love occupied the field. He had begun to dream of a happy life, such as he had dreamed of when he married his first wife. He had been disappointed in his first dream, now the second was dispelled.

'I'll send for Crudge to-morrow,' he said. 'I'll see if I can't have that confounded settlement altered. What a fool I was to have any at all, but I was infatuated. I thought, after all the marks of tenderness I showered on the girl, she must love me. What wicked ingratitude after all I have done! Her keep must have cost five-and-twenty pounds per annum, and she has been with me seven years, that is a hundred-and-seventy-five pounds—then her clothing. Why! I've spent on the minx two hundred pounds at the lowest computation—and now to desert me! What I have wasted on her would have brought me in ten pound per annum at five per cent.'

He fussed about his shop, now closed. He routed in the drawers, he poked about in the kitchen, in the vain hope of discovering that he had been robbed of something by Joanna, so as to be able to take out a summons against her. He could not find that anything was gone. Darkness closed in. The wind piped and sobbed under the doors and in at the keyholes, and the rain drizzled against the window-panes.

'Ah!' said Lazarus, shuddering, 'a south-west wind blowing up Channel, charged with moisture. Twenty-four hours of rain. I hope Joanna and her mother are out in it, without shelter for their heads to-night.' He listened to the drip from the window-ledges, and the pour down the fall pipe. 'They were wet when first they came into this house, may they be as wet and shivery now they leave it!'

He groped for sticks to light his fire. He was unsuccessful. The art of making a fire is not in man, it is instinctive in woman. He either lays it or lights it wrong. Lazarus found out that he had to deal with a most intractable art. The sticks were too thick, or the paper too profuse, or the coals sluggish in kindling. A whole newspaper went in a flare

without lighting the wood, and when the wood was kindled with the application of a candle, it refused to communicate its fire to the coals.

So he sat in the cold and dark, growling and miserable. Then he heard a scratching noise about him, like the uncurling of crumbled paper. He struck a match, relit the candle which had been extinguished whilst applied to the sticks in the grate, and saw that the floor was alive with blackbeetles, which fled in all directions when the match flared.

He left the candle lighted on the table, and relapsed into his chair, and into brooding over his wrongs.

He was dissatisfied with the prospect before him. He would never be able to replace Joanna. Mrs. Thresher was a voracious eater, and would expect her meals at his house. He would have to keep Polly as well, and he was doubtful whether Polly would settle into the business after the more lively experiences of the bar. He reasoned with himself that life with Joanna would have been a daily struggle. Set a beggar on horseback and he will ride to the devil; give a savage clothes, and a wardrobe will not suffice him. Translated from the kitchen to the parlour, from being in subjection to sharing the rule, she would have indulged in extravagance, have loved idleness, neglected business for pleasure. Then he thought of Charles Cheek; and he asked whether Joanna was not really fond of him. How she had interceded for him! His picture taken hand-in-hand with her he had discovered in her bedroom. If he had Joanna as his wife, might he not expect a similar experience to that he had undergone with Rachel?

Then he felt again the sting of the blows Charles had dealt him, the shaking, the humiliation before the eyes of Joanna, and his blood rushed to his face. Charles had been in confinement since Saturday afternoon. On Monday, being a Bank holiday, no magistrate was sitting. Tuesday, at eleven, he would go and take out a proper summons against him. The police were not likely to act heartily in the matter. They knew Charles Cheek, and had received many a tip from him.

How badly the candle burned! What was that? He had lighted a wax candle from upstairs instead of a kitchen dip. That came of having strangers in the house! Mrs. Thresher could use nothing but the best for the kitchen. A curl of wax was formed at the side of the candle, folding over and over like a winding-sheet. No wonder the candle burnt

badly, a thief was in it. Lazarus snuffed the wick with his fingers, and snuffed out the light.

At once, from all sides, came the rustling of the black-beetles emerging from their holes and spreading over the floor. Lazarus fancied they were about his chair, scrambling up his legs. He stood up, shook himself, relit the candle, and ran about, stamping on the retreating insects.

How lonely he felt in the house! How still it was, like a house that was dead! A chill sense of solitude crept over him. What if he had another fit in the night. What if he woke up, feeling ill, wanting brandy, or to be bled, and no one was in the house to come to his help; and he was senseless or weak in the morning, unable to open the door when Mrs. Thresher came? But—would Mrs. Thresher come? Perhaps she did not know that he had driven away Joanna and her mother. Lazarus was alarmed. He went to the house door, and unchained and unlocked it, opened, and stood in the doorway, looking out into the doleful night. The rain came down like a fine spray between him and the lamp. The illuminated windows of the houses were surrounded by fog bows and magnified to stars of the first magnitude. Those persons who went by were buried under umbrellas. A rill ran in the gutter, spinning cabbage leaves, stray fish heads on its surface. He would get very wet if he went along the Barbican quay to the ham and sausage shop. Besides, he was ashamed to appear there and confess that he was afraid to spend the night alone in the house. Mrs. Thresher knew nothing of his fit. That insulting old Radical, Mr. Thresher, would twit him with the events of Saturday evening.

As he stood in the door, doubtful what to do, something rubbed against his shin and stole past him. He looked down, but could make nothing out in the dark. He re-shut and re-barred the door, and went back to the kitchen.

'I will try again to light a fire,' he said; 'then I sha'n't feel so miserable and solitary. It is all Joanna's doing.'

He relaid the fire, and poured some paraffin over the coals. He was successful this time. The flames ascended to the sticks, the sticks crackled, and then with a leap the fire was on the top, the mineral oil was ablaze, and the coals emitted puffs of flame, and began to glow.

Lazarus was so occupied with the fire that he did not observe the presence of a black cat, watching him out of its green eyes, seated on the table. Only when the Jew got up

from his knees and took the kettle to fill it did he notice the creature. He stood still, staring at it in surprise, holding the kettle in one hand. Lazarus had a great dislike to cats. As he looked at the cat the cat looked at him. In the dark the narrow slits of iris had expanded. The eyes shone like moonstones in the candlelight.

'Get out,' said Lazarus; 'I don't want cats here.' The monition was unheeded.

'Do you hear what I say? Get out with you.'

The cat rose and stretched itself, driving its claws into the deal of the table top, and then reseated itself.

'Is that done to insult me?' asked Lazarus. 'What have you come here for? Do you think to hunt mice among my valuable china, and to kitten and rear a family among costly garments? Wait a bit, Yowler! I'll make you yowl!'

He took his light, and went into the shop to get a whip.

He laid hold of the stick that Charles had employed on his own back, and brought it with him into the kitchen. When he returned the cat was gone.

'Where the devil is the creature?' asked Lazarus, looking about him, and switching about with the stick.

He laid the stick on the table, and reseated himself in his chair. But he could now think of nothing but the cat. What had become of the beast? Was it in the larder, getting at the bread and the butter, or the milk, or the mutton chops? He listened, but heard no sound save the drip of the water. Was it in the shop? Or had it got into his own little room, and was prowling among some Capo di Monte, Dresden, and Chelsea figures he had there? He took up the stick again. It was weighted with lead in the handle. If he had the chance he would bring that end down on the head of the cat and kill it. He held the candle in one hand and the stick in the other. He thrust the stick into every corner of the kitchen without dislodging his visitor. He peered into the coal closet, he searched the back kitchen, he examined the larder; the cat was nowhere to be found. Then he went down the passage to the shop. It was hopeless to expect to discover the cat there if it had chosen to conceal itself among the sundry objects piled and scattered through it. He held his breath and listened. Was that the cat purring? On tiptoe he crept near to the place whence the noise came. It was in the window. He craned his ear, then thrust forward the candle, and had it nearly blown out. A pane had been starred by a stone some time ago, and he had

mended it with strips of adhesive paper from a sheet of postage stamps. One strip was loose, and the indriving draught fluttered it and made a sound like the purring of a cat. Then the Jew left the shop and fastened the door behind him, and explored his little sanctum. That door had been left ajar, and it was quite possible that the cat had entered. He sought it in every corner, under the presses, under the bed, behind the sedans. He could see nothing of it. He listened; he could not hear it. Yet the cat must be in the house somewhere, and when he was quiet, and fallen asleep, he would be startled by the gleam of the moony eyes, and a crash; the cat had upset and broken some valuable porcelain. He shut his bedroom door; he shut the passage door, and was again in the kitchen, and there, on the table in the same place as before, as though it had remained there undisturbed, was the black cat, watching him out of its lambent eyes.

'I'll have a watch-dog. If I have to pay fifteen shillings for one I will have one, if only to keep cats away.'

Lazarus was sly. He put the stick behind his back, and turned it in his hand so as to hold the slight end. Then he came towards the table step by step; he would not rouse the suspicions of the creature. He put the candle on the floor.

'Pretty! pretty!' said the Jew in a caressing tone. 'Will I hurt my beauty? Oh no! it is not in the heart of old Lazarus to do you harm. Do you want milk? There is some in the jug in the larder. What do you say to a herring's head? There are some in the sink. May I chuck you under the chin? May I scratch your back, you beauty?'

But the creature did not suffer him to approach without rising, setting up its back, and charging its tail and hair with electricity so that they bristled like the hairs of a flue-brush. The expression of its eyes was threatening. It half opened its mouth and showed the long white teeth that armed the gums. Lazarus was afraid the cat would leap at his face, and he put up his arm to protect his eyes, thought better of his attempt, and backed, still watching the cat, into the outer kitchen.

'The black imp!' he muttered. 'I must make a way for it to escape.' Then he unbolted the back door into the yard, and left it ajar.

Having done this he returned to the kitchen. The cat was no longer on the table, no longer visible. Whither it had gone he could not guess. He was afraid to search, lest it

should leap out upon him with extended claws, and flaming eyes, and keen teeth to fasten in his flesh.

'I'll have a watch-dog. I must—I will. If it cost me thirty shillings I'll have one to-morrow. As long as Joanna was here none was needed. This is another expense she is putting me to. Oh, I wish the cat would find her, and fly in her face and tear her wicked eyes out.'

He fetched a bottle of brandy from the cupboard, took the kettle from the fire, and mixed himself a strong glass. Then he drew his chair close to the stove and drank his brandy-and-water, listening for the cat, and cursing it, and then Joanna, and thinking he heard a step, and found it was the girl, with a cat's face, and flaming eyes, and a chain of Roman pearls dangling round the neck, and then—somehow the pink silk dress flickered before him, but the brush of the cat hung below it and swept the floor ; and then the howdah upstairs began to dance by itself, and the Sabbatical lamp to swing as a flaming pendulum, all its seven jets alight as he watched it, and wondered whether it would swing so high as to unhook itself from the ceiling and come down with a crash and go out. He poured out more brandy, but was dozing and waking intermittently, and forgot to add the water, and the loaded stick was on the table trying to lift itself on its ferule and dance, but the head was heavy, and at each effort down it came again with a bang.

So he slept, with feverish dreams, sitting in his chair, waiting for the cat to go out at the back-door, when he would lock it and retire to his bed, and then for a while forgetting why he sat up. The coals crackled and grew cold. The candle burnt down to the socket and dissolved all the wax, and the flame turned blue and danced over the molten wax.

Then—all at once Lazarus sprang up with a cry, and caught at the stick. Before him stood two figures. He could see their faces indistinctly by the flicker of the expiring candle —one a coarse face marked with scars, and a heavy lower jaw. He felt the stick wrenched from his trembling hand, and after that he saw and felt no more.

On the following morning there was a stir at the Barbican. During the night the Golden Balls had been entered, robbed, and Lazarus had been found lying dead in his kitchen with his skull broken. A loaded stick lay at his side. On the table, purring and complacent, beside an empty candlestick, sat an ownerless black cat.

CHAPTER LX.

TWO PICTURES.

Every window of Court Royal is lighted up, and the terrace is hung with coloured lamps. Carriage after carriage drives up and deposits members of every knowable family for many miles round Kingsbridge, for the Cheek-Roseveres are settled in, and are giving their first soirée of dancing and music.

The footmen in scarlet and buff are in the hall and on the grand staircase—scarlet and buff are the Cheek-Rosevere livery, because no more showy livery could be thought of. That of the Eveleighs was only buff and scarlet. The house had gone through a reformation under the hands of an art adviser and Oxford Street furniture dealers. Much of the old decoration was preserved but renovated ; most of the good Chippendale furniture, and Florentine inlaid cabinets, and Sèvres and Dresden china, and the pictures of Morland, and Gainsborough, and Gerard Dow were still there. But everything was freshened up, the gilding regilt and burnished, the colours brightened, the polished wood re-polished. The curtains, the coverings, were all of silk or satin, and were new.

The state drawing-room was lighted by electric burners, the chandeliers had been banished from the ball-room. The old motto of the Eveleighs, 'Quod antiquatur et senescit prope interitum est,' was everywhere effaced and supplanted by 'Nil præstat buccæ,' which may be interpreted 'Nothing like Cheek.' In the dining-room, over the chimney-piece, the Ducal arms had made way for the cognizance of the Cheeks, an unicorn, beneath which was inscribed 'Plentie of Pushe' as well as 'Nil præstat buccæ,' for the old scroll of the legend had been utilised, and two mottoes were needed to fill the scroll from which the lengthy inscription had been erased. Besides, as the family name was double, and the arms were double, why not duplicate the motto?

Some time has elapsed since the event described in the last chapter, and in that time great changes have taken place. The affairs of the Duke reached a climax ; Court Royal was lost, and passed to Cheek of the Monokeratic system. But the Monokeros was too pushing and prosperous a beast to be resigned, and the old man remained at the head of the

establishment in town, gathering in money as fast as he could, with both hands.

The old man's objections to his son's marriage with Joanna gave way when he found she was entitled to the whole of the Jew's fortune, amounting to seventy thousand pounds. 'A clever girl—a girl of the period,' he said; knows how to work her way to the fore. She would have been invaluable to me in my shop.'

Never had the state rooms of Court Royal looked so brilliant and beautiful as this night. Charles Cheek stood in the drawing-room receiving his guests. But we beg his pardon, he is no longer Mr. C. Cheek, but Mr. Cheek-Rosevere—he has assumed his wife's name in addition to his own. Every now and then Charles looked round in expectation and uneasiness for Joanna, who was not present. Prepossessing and handsome, with his fair hair, light moustache, and pleasant blue eyes, he had a cheerful greeting for everyone. 'But where is Joanna?' he thought, and the guests looked round also, and wandered through the rooms in quest of their hostess. 'How very odd! Why is not Mrs. Cheek-Rosevere here to receive us?'

Presently, when all had arrived, a couple of scarlet and buff footmen threw open a door to an inner room and boudoir, and in loud voices announced

'Mrs. Cheek-Rosevere!!!'

Whereupon Joanna appeared, charmingly dressed in the richest pearl silk, and wearing abundance of diamonds, *holding a bouquet of hothouse flowers in each hand*; she sailed, smilingly, looking very lovely, down the room, bowing to the right and to the left, giving a hand to none—how could she, holding flowers in each hand?

'My dear Joe!' said Charles to her after everyone was gone, 'how could you behave as you did? It was rude—it was grossly impertinent, and we are such new comers.'

'My dear Charlie,' answered Joanna, with perfect self-satisfaction, 'I know what I am about. Lady Grace could not have done it, and would not; she could afford to be condescending and sweet; her position was unassailable. On the other hand, we are nobodies, who have risen to the surface through trade. We cannot afford to be gracious, or folks will say we are pleading to be received into society. We must be insolent, and take our place by storm.'

* * * * * * *

On the road from Teignmouth to Dawlish, a little out of the town, stand two houses in their grounds. The road is somewhat steep, ascending through red banks of sandstone. Presently a little garden door is reached, where there is a fork in the road, and over the wall of red stone can be seen a luxurious growth of arbutus, guelder rose, and acacia, and above the flowering bushes the brown thatch of a cottage, with bedroom windows peeping out through the thatch. By standing on tiptoe one can even look into the garden and see that the cottage has a verandah covered with creeping roses, and that French windows open into this verandah.

A little way higher up the hill is a more pretentious house in what may be called the Italian villa style ; but the house is more than a villa, it is almost a mansion. The grounds are fairly extensive, the pines are luxuriant and of choice kinds. The insignis is grown there to a stately tree. There are glass conservatories. At the door stands a footman in buff and scarlet. The windows are of plate glass.

Presently an old gentleman, with hair white as snow, and an almost transparent, wax-like complexion, is wheeled into the garden in a chair, attended by an old bent man, leaning on a stick, and a lady, gentle and smiling.

We recognise our old friends, the Duke of Kingsbridge, Lord Ronald, and Lady Grace. Shortly after the Marquess comes forth, and the party descend the hill.

As they pass the little green door of the cottage, which sits, as it were, at the feet of the other, it is opened, and from it issue Mr. Worthivale and his daughter Lucy.

The united party proceeds to the walk along the sea-wall, extending for a mile, above the sands at low water and the sea when the tide is full. There they will be joined after a while by Beavis, who is in a solicitor's office in the town, and likely eventually to be taken into partnership.

Not all the estates of the Duke have been sold. Court Royal—dear Court Royal—is lost for ever. The manor of Kingsbridge is gone. Alvington, Loddiswell, Charlton, are all gone, but Fowelscombe remains—ruinous, indeed, but not lost—and Bigbury.

'You may depend upon it,' says Mr. Worthivale, 'all we want is time. Penzance is used up. Torquay is done for. The aspect of Paington is against it. The time must come when Bigbury Bay will form a crescent of glittering white houses, tier on tier—when the express from town will fly past

Torquay, leap the Dart on a tubular bridge at Dartmouth, and rush past Kingsbridge to find a terminus at Bigbury, *the* climatic resort of the future. Then, your Grace——'

'My dear Worthivale, I shall not live to see the first stone of the new town laid, nor the first sod of the new line turned.'

'But, your Grace, what a comfort to think of the future, the reflorescence of this splendid house! I, also, may not see it, but I live in faith. Your grandchildren——

'Dear Worthivale,' said the Marquess, 'I am sorry to dash your dream, but I shall never marry.'

'Nor I,' said Lady Grace, in a low tone.

'So the race will die with us. Quod antiquatur et senescit —prope interitum est.'

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